PATTERNS OF POWER

# Two Votes, One Road

*French Sudan, 1880–1960*

*How France conquered a valley that offered it three conquests stacked on one another and recruited the oldest against the newest; how, finding no crop a family could own, it built a state irrigation scheme that made tenants where cocoa elsewhere made proprietors; how it formed a few thousand clerks and schoolmasters and no one else at all; and why the class it left behind, holding a payroll rather than a property, had nothing to ask for but the state itself*

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with Claude (Anthropic)

*held as tested, not revealed*

PREFACE

# PREFACE

> *On what this study is, how it was made, and what may be trusted in it*

This is the Sudanese case study of the Patterns of Power collection, and it exists because of a puzzle in a ballot box.

On 28 September 1958 the territories of French West Africa were asked whether to remain inside a French Community or take immediate independence. Guinea alone said no, and left at once. Côte d’Ivoire said yes overwhelmingly and remained close to France for a generation. The French Sudan said yes as well, in the high nineties — and was an independent republic within two years, out of the currency within four, and running a single-party state on a socialist road for the rest of the decade.

Three colonies, one metropole, one law, one federation, one afternoon at the polls, and three different countries at the end of it. The collection has already followed the Ivorian road. This volume follows the third one, and asks the question the ballot makes unavoidable: if a yes and a no could lead to the same place, and two yeses to opposite ones, what was actually doing the sorting?

The answer this study arrives at is not about the men who led, though men led and chose. It is about what the ground would grow. Rain in the Niger valley will not carry a tree crop, so this colony produced no African proprietors: no cocoa, no coffee, nothing a family could plant with a hoe and own for thirty years. What France built instead was a state irrigation scheme on the inland delta, onto which tens of thousands were moved under compulsion, where the state held the water and the canals and the levelled ground, and where in time the right to farm a plot

came up for renewal every twelve months. The class that inherited this country was accordingly not a class of owners. It was a payroll — schoolmasters, clerks, medical assistants, veterans and railwaymen, formed in French schools in their thousands and employed by a federation whose offices sat in another territory. A class holding property asks to be let in. A class holding a wage packet asks for the till. Only the second has to take the state to get what it wants.

That is the argument, and the eleven parts before the last one are the evidence for it.

**On the collaboration.** This volume was produced by its author working with Claude, an AI model made by Anthropic. The division of labour is the collection's usual one. The framework is the author's. The historical reconstruction, the source work, the prose and the production are Claude's, conducted under the author's direction and to the collection's standards. Where the study found the framework's expectations wrong it says so on the page rather than quietly conforming, and the reversals are marked where they fall. The largest of them concerns exit: this collection had concluded that a man's ability to leave is a fact about what he owns, and the people who walked out of Banamba in 1905 owned nothing at all.

**On what may be trusted.** The rule of this collection is that public-domain primary sources are quoted exactly, that modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited, and that nothing whatever is reconstructed from memory. This study leans on a small number of texts it can stand behind: the *Ta'rīkh as-Sūdān* of al-Sa'di in Houdas's translation of 1900; Mungo Park's *Travels* of 1799; the protectorate treaties as printed in Rouard de Card's compilation of 1897; the Brussels General Act of 1890; the debates of 28 and 31 July 1885 as reproduced by the Assemblée nationale; the domanial decree of 23 October 1904; Gallieni's own narratives; and the French statutes of 1946 and 1956.

Where it depends on transcriptions of unpublished archival material it says so and names the intermediary rather than passing the transcription off as its own reading. Where a figure could not be traced to a source this study was willing to stand behind, it has been given as a range, flagged, or refused outright — and the refusals are recorded rather than silently omitted. Four gaps in particular are named repeatedly and were never closed: the head tax in francs per person per year; the mortality on the railway and the irrigation works; a demographic series for the territory across the colonial period; and the text of the Chamber debate of 7 December 1900. A reader who wants to test the study's arithmetic should start there.

The reader should also know the shape of the archive. Almost everything written about what happened in this colony was written by the men who governed it or by the movement that succeeded them, and this territory records its conquerors' dead by name and its own not at all. Where that is so, the study reports it as a finding about the archive rather than filling the space with an estimate. The one great exception is the Arabic chronicle tradition of Timbuktu and the river towns, which gives this collection something it has rarely had: a conquered order's own written account of the conquests that made it.

**On the method.** The study sets the exact public words beside the exact private or on-the-ground words and lets the distance speak. It lays out the arithmetic and leaves the sum to the reader. Legibility is not pardon: explaining why an order made sense to the men running it is not a defence of it, and naming a legal fiction as a fiction is not the same as calling the people who lived under it fools. The final part states the strongest case for the arrangement at what the study takes to be its full strength — including the largest item, the ending of slavery in a society built on it — and answers it without flinching, crediting the achievement without swallowing the self-justification.

Nothing here is written for effect.

OUTLINE

# THE ARGUMENT IN THIRTEEN PARTS

*What each part of the study does, and what it finds*

**The Landscape — Our Last Chance of a Great Empire.** The two worlds on the eve. In the Niger valley, three orders of three different ages stacked on one another: a millennium-old Islamic society that had fully naturalised, a Bambara kingdom built in 1712 out of slave-soldiers where a crown slave became king, and over both a jihad empire twenty-nine years old that was still garrisoning its own subjects. Across the sea, a republic seated by one vote, spending heavily to install a conviction in French children, and told by a Paris review that the Sudan was its last chance of an empire.

**One — Twenty-Seven Europeans.** Who carried the rifles. Twenty-seven Europeans and two hundred and sixty-five African regulars went up the wall at Ouosséboungou; the ratio holds for eight years. Men bought out of slavery to enlist, rewarded after an action with captives of their own. A conquest funded by a caravan duty payable in cash, cowries, or one captive in ten. Officers who asked for one thing and did three, and were confirmed by decree afterwards.

**Two — Vacant and Without a Master.** Who got what, and by what words. A treaty in which one party surrenders his present and future states unconditionally while the other’s promise carries its release clause in the next paragraph. A book of such treaties printed in Paris for European chancelleries. Kingdoms invented by decree and handed to a telegraph clerk. And fourteen words from the Napoleonic Code transferring a country by defining fallow ground as ownerless.

**Three — The Hideous African Sore.** The story, and its two audiences. A crusade against slavery preached from a Paris pulpit — the one proposition an anticlerical republic and a cardinal could both sign — and an international treaty whose first article prescribes, as the remedy, an administration, garrisons and a railway. And a second, smaller story told at Ségou: the restoration of the dynasty the previous conqueror had displaced.

**Four — The School of Hostages.** Formation, and the refusal of it. Schools whose official name was *écoles des otages*, holding the sons of defeated chiefs. A governor writing that there was no duty to create openings in the administration for a population which alone bore the burden of public expenditure. Eight per cent of children in school at independence — and, running the whole time on its own money, a Qur’anic system France could only watch.

**Five — Fifteen Days and a Hundred Francs.** Why the cultivator paid. A penalty requiring no evidence, no hearing and no delay, imposed by the man who also drew up the tax roll. And the great test of it: over a million people walking out of slavery from 1905, owning nothing but what they could carry, while their propertied neighbours stayed and paid.

**Six — The Second Portion.** What was taken. A tax payable only in francs, which obliges a millet household to enter a market it has no other reason to enter. A sweat tax in days. Conscripts diverted by decree to dig canals for three years. And a scheme of nine hundred and sixty thousand planned hectares that made tenants where a different crop elsewhere made owners.

**Seven — The Seventh of December.** Information, and what actually suppressed it. In the colony, a printed register of every cleric in the federation. At home, a massacre known to the press within weeks, a book, a deputy at the tribune — and a Chamber that voted the inquiry down. The strong form of suppression is

not concealment; it is letting a fact be aired and produce nothing.

**Eight — Eleven Beads.** The chain of interests, and the one link that would not close. Every position France distributed was one France had created and could withdraw, so every holder defended the arrangement in his own interest without instruction. Except a sharif at Nioro whose standing France had not granted and could not revoke — interned for nineteen years, dead in a camp in the Creuse, his death concealed for two and a half.

**Nine — The Same Rights and the Same Wages.** Whether the liberties were real. For fifty years, four monopolies in one hand under the loudest rights rhetoric in Europe. Then, in fourteen months and out of France's own quarrel with itself, citizenship, the end of the *indigénat*, and the right to organise — immediately qualified. Eighteen months later fifteen thousand railwaymen shut the federation for a hundred and sixty days.

**Ten — Put on a Train at Dakar.** Where the crack opened, which was four thousand kilometres away. The imperial cost column is set at the margin by the most expensive case and applied to all; a quiet colony was released by a war in Algeria. And the Sudanese yes of 1958 was a vote for a federation, killed within a fortnight by the territory with the receipts.

**Eleven — The Year of the Large Chest.** What it cost. No classic collapse: France kept the fields where they were. But it took over the extraction of the states it destroyed and not their insurance, and famine crossed the Sahel in 1913 while the administration barely responded. The years have names in four languages.

**Twelve — Two Votes, One Road.** The comparison, and the counter-position. Why a yes and a no led to the same place and two yeses to opposite ones. The strongest defence of the arrangement stated at full strength — the abolition, the peace,

the courts that stopped the killing of accused witches, the mildness — and four refusals that answer it without denying any of it.

LANDSCAPE

# OUR LAST CHANCE OF A GREAT EMPIRE

> *The ground before the columns — the Niger valley as a stack of conquests, one of them barely a generation old, and the France that needed the valley for reasons of its own*

## The question an armed man asks when he arrives

Strip away what was said in Paris and a conquest is a man with the best guns in the district working out an income. He does not want a battle; a battle costs money and men and has to be won again next year. He wants a sum that arrives every dry season without his having to go and get it. Everything he does in the first decade is bent to that single problem, and the shape his answer takes is decided less by what he believes than by what he finds already standing when he gets off the boat.

If the country has somebody at the top of it — a ruler with a treasury, a court, tax-collectors who already ride out and come back full — then the newcomer has a cheap road available. Beat that man once, keep him or replace him with his cousin, and let the machine he inherited go on turning, taking a share off the top. The Mamluks kept an Abbasid caliph in Cairo for two and a half centuries for something close to this reason: a figure the population already honoured cost far less to house than a legitimacy built from nothing would have cost to install. If instead the country is a scatter of villages with nobody in it whose word binds anyone beyond his own quarter, the newcomer has nothing to capture. He must appoint collectors, arm them, defend them from their neighbours, and pay for the

whole apparatus out of the revenue it collects, every year, for as long as he stays.

A second question cuts across the first, and the two together decide most of what follows. Does he want the ground, or the people on it? A conqueror who means to plant his own farmers finds the existing population an obstacle, and moves in the direction of clearing it. A conqueror who means to tax and recruit finds the population is the asset, and needs it alive, settled, and countable. Those are different colonies with different laws, different violence, and different endings, and it is worth being exact about the difference rather than folding them together, because they were not the same thing and the people inside them did not experience the same thing.

The Niger valley in the 1880s was not a vacuum, and it was not being entered by a man with a free hand. Britain held the Gambia and the Gold Coast and was moving on the lower Niger; the general European scramble for the interior was under way, and a claim that could not be shown to other Europeans on a map was not worth making. That constraint matters more here than it does in most cases, because the Sudan produced no gold rush, drew no settlers, and lay a thousand kilometres from a port. Much of what France did there was addressed less to the people it was doing it to than to the powers it was racing.

So the landscape has to be reconstructed twice: the valley, and the country that sent the columns into it. What follows takes each in turn and holds off the conquest itself.

## Landscape I — The valley

### *Nothing here was aboriginal*

The first thing to establish about the Niger bend is that no one arriving in it, at any date, met an original condition. The valley had been under one imperial arrangement or another for

something like a thousand years before a French officer saw it: Ghana, then Mali, then Songhay, each of them built by somebody's cavalry and each of them, given enough undisturbed decades, ceasing to feel like an arrangement at all and beginning to feel like the world. Islam came up the caravan roads with the salt and the gold and settled first in the trading towns, so that by the fifteenth century Timbuktu and Djenné held scholarly families, working law courts, and libraries — a literate class whose authority did not depend on whoever happened to be sitting in the capital that year.

The clearest recorded instance of a conquest turning into furniture is also the one for which we have the conquered order's own written account, which is rare enough anywhere and almost unheard of in this collection. In October 1590 the Saadian sultan of Morocco, Ahmad al-Mansur, sent an army south across the desert to take the Songhay empire and its trade. The force that crossed was small — the chronicler puts it at three thousand fighting men with roughly twice that number of followers, artisans and physicians, while later reckonings run between about three and four thousand combatants — and it was commanded by Judar Pasha, a Spaniard taken as a child and raised in the sultan's household. It carried arquebuses and cannon against an army with swords and bows, and at Tondibi in the spring of 1591 the thing was over almost before it began. The chronicler, Abd al-Rahman al-Sa'di, describes the Songhay infantry doing what their discipline required of them and refusing to run: *« Quand l'armée fut défaite ils jetèrent leurs boucliers sur le sol et s'accroupirent sur ces sortes de sièges, attendant l'arrivée des troupes de Djouder qui les massacrèrent dans cette attitude sans qu'ils fissent résistance et cela parce qu'ils ne devaient point fuir en cas de déroute. Les soldats marocains leur enlevèrent les bracelets d'or qu'ils avaient au bras. »* — When the army was broken they threw their shields on the ground and squatted on them as on stools, waiting for Judar's troops, who massacred them in that posture without

their offering resistance, because they were not to flee in a rout; the Moroccan soldiers took the gold bracelets from their arms.

What al-Sa'di then writes about the consequence is a description of an order being taken apart. Before, he says, the country had been one of the most favoured by God in wealth and fertility, and under Askia al-Hajj Muhammad the ruler's commands *« accomplis sans peine dans son palais s'exécutaient avec autant de facilité sur tous les points les plus éloignés de l'empire »* — carried out effortlessly in his palace, executed with the same ease at the furthest points of the empire. Afterwards: *« le trouble, les calamités et la violence succédèrent à la tranquillité »* — disorder, calamity and violence succeeded tranquillity. Everywhere men preyed on one another; free people were seized and made slaves; and around Djenné, he records, the country was wrecked by *« les Bambaras idolâtres »* who destroyed the villages and took free women as concubines.

Two things about that passage repay attention. The first is that al-Sa'di is not neutral: he is a townsman and a scholar, writing from inside the clerical world, and the Bambara are to him idolaters. The second, and more useful, is the explanation he reaches for. He does not say the Songhay lost because they had no firearms. He says the dynasty had fallen into abominations — wine, and worse — and that *« c'est à cause de ces abominations que Dieu se vengea en attirant sur le Songhaï l'armée marocaine victorieuse »* — it was because of these abominations that God took vengeance by drawing the victorious Moroccan army down upon Songhay. A conquest by muskets, explained as a judgement. And the man writing it held office under the conquerors: by 1646 al-Sa'di was chief secretary to the Arma at Timbuktu, the caste descended from those same Moroccan musketeers, who had married locally, stopped obeying Marrakesh within about twenty years, and settled into a self-electing military oligarchy over the river towns. He gives them and the Songhay askias a common eastern

ancestry, which threads the new masters into the old line. That is what the second and third generations of a successful conquest look like from the inside: not a lie told by cynics, but a real man with a real position writing the arrangement he lived in into the order of the world, quite possibly believing every word.

By 1880 the Arma at Timbuktu were not foreigners in any sense a resident would have recognised. They were simply a local group with a particular ancestry, one element among Songhay, Tuareg, Arab and Fulani in a town whose real continuities were its scholars and its trade. The conquest of 1591 had taken. That is what the completed version of the process looks like, and it is the benchmark against which everything else in this valley should be measured.

### *The Bambara state: slave soldiers who became the aristocracy*

South and west of the river towns lay a different kind of order, and one built within recorded memory out of the wreckage the Moroccans left. Around 1712 a man named Mamari Coulibaly, called Bitòn, took over a *ton* at Ségou — one of the age-set associations of young men that were an ordinary feature of Bambara social life — and turned it into a private army, filling it out with runaway slaves and men taken in his own campaigns. These were the *tonjon*, slave-warriors, and they became the state. Bitòn fortified Ségou, put war canoes on the Niger, and took Bamako and Djenné. He died in 1755; his sons could not hold what he had built; and in about 1766 one of the crown slaves, Ngolo Diarra, called the other slave-warriors together at the central shrine, held them there, and made them acknowledge him as *faama*. He founded the dynasty that ruled Ségou until 1861.

The plainest fact in this story is that a man who had been handed over to the state as tribute became its king, and that this

was not felt as a scandal but as how the place worked. An order in which the armed slaves are the political class, and a slave can end as the sovereign, is an order that has had time to acquire its own logic and its own sense of the fitting. It was not Muslim; the Ségou kings kept the old shrines and were periodically at odds with the Muslim trading families in their own towns. And it was rich enough to astonish a visitor. Mungo Park, walking in from the Gambia on behalf of the African Association, reached Ségou in July 1796, waited on the bank for a ferry among a crowd that stared at him, and wrote: “The view of this extensive city; the numerous canoes upon the river; the crowded population and the cultivated state of the surrounding country, formed altogether a prospect of civilization and magnificence, which I little expected to find in the bosom of Africa.”

Set that beside the arithmetic of the conqueror at the top of this landscape and its significance is immediate. Ségou in 1796 was exactly the thing an arriving power most wants to find: an apex, with a treasury, a standing force, a capital, and a habit of obedience running down from it that somebody else had spent a century and a half building. Whoever took Ségou would inherit a working machine.

### *The empire that was thirty years old*

Somebody did take it, and not the French.

In the first half of the nineteenth century a series of Muslim reform movements swept the western Sudan, each of them a conquest carried out in the language of purification. Around 1818 Seku Amadu built the Fulani state of Macina on the inland delta, with its capital at Hamdullahi, against Fulani chiefs he judged to be tributary to the idolaters of Ségou. Then, from 1852, came the largest of them. Umar Tall, a Tukulor cleric from the Senegal valley who had made the pilgrimage and returned as the Tijaniyya’s authority for the region, launched a jihad from Dinguiraye. He was repulsed by the French at Medina on the

Senegal in 1857 and turned east instead, where the going was better: Kaarta fell in 1855, and on 10 March 1861 his forces took Ségou itself. He installed his son Ahmadu there and marched down the Niger against Macina, which had aided Ségou; Hamdullahi fell in May 1862, and the Macina ruler Amadu III was executed. In 1863 the Fulani of Macina rose with the help of the Kunta clerics of Timbuktu, destroyed the Umarian army, and killed Umar in 1864.

Three things in that sequence matter for what France would find.

The first is that the last of these wars was Muslim against Muslim, and specifically Tijani against Qadiri — a fight between brotherhoods over who had the right to say what Islam required in the Niger valley. It is a mistake, and one this study will keep having to resist, to treat the Islam of this region as a single body with a single interest. A Timbuktu jurist, a Kunta shaykh, a Soninke clerical lineage that had traded and taught for centuries without ever raising a soldier, and a Tukulor warrior-cleric with cavalry were four different positions with four different things to lose.

The second is that the Tukulor empire was not a naturalised order. It was a garrison. Ahmadu ruled at Ségou over a Bambara population that had been forcibly converted and had not accepted it, in a town his father had stormed within living memory. Revolts were routine, and the empire had to be reconquered in pieces almost continuously. By 1886 it had formally broken into four, with Ahmadu at Nioro, his son at Ségou, his cousin in Macina and his brother at Dinguiraye — and one of those brothers, Aguibou, would go over to the French. An order that must garrison its own subjects, put down its own provinces, and watch its own family is an order paying the expensive price, and it had not had the generations it would have needed to stop paying it.

The third follows from the second. When French columns came up the river, the Bambara of Ségou were not a people who had to be persuaded to abandon a beloved sovereign. They were a people under a foreign garrison thirty years old, and there was a party among them who would help. Ségou fell to Archinard's column in early April 1890 — the fifth or the sixth, depending on the account — and it fell to a French force operating with Bambara allies.

This is the correction the valley makes to a comfortable expectation. It is easy to assume that a conqueror always arrives at a settled world, that the order he breaks is one that had long since ceased to feel like an order. Sometimes that is exactly right — the Arma at Timbuktu are the proof. But in the same valley, at the same moment, France met a conquest that had not finished happening, and the difference decided the whole opening of the campaign. A conquest still in progress leaves a resentful substrate lying about that the next arrival can recruit; a conquest that took leaves none. Nothing here is a law. It is a matter of how many undisturbed generations an arrangement got, and the Tukulor got twenty-nine.

### *What the labour looked like*

One more feature of the ground has to be stated before crossing the sea, because it will decide more about this colony than the identity of any ruler.

The economies of the Niger valley ran substantially on slavery. Slaves cleared and worked the grain estates of the Maraka towns, staffed households, carried loads on the caravan roads, and — in the Bambara case — filled the army and supplied the political class. The historian Martin Klein, whose study of the question is the standard one, distinguishes as the French sources did between people acquired by capture or purchase and people born into servitude in the household, and is careful to say that the numbers can never be recovered with precision:

French administrators were poorly informed, slaveholders had every reason to under-report, and the questionnaires of 1894 in the Sudan and 1904 across French West Africa were compiled by men who in many cases simply guessed. What can be said without invention is that in parts of this region the enslaved were a very large minority of the population and in some districts a majority, and that the wars of the nineteenth century — Umar's, Samory's, and those of the states they fought — had been manufacturing captives at scale for decades.

France was about to arrive as the country that had abolished slavery in its own possessions in 1848, into a region where slavery was the labour system. What it did about that is not a matter for a landscape. But the terms of the collision are: an economy whose surplus was extracted from unfree people, meeting a state whose republican self-description made abolition one of its proudest facts.

## Landscape II — The France that sent the columns

### *A republic that had not yet been believed*

Cross to the other shore and the first thing to fix is that the France of the 1880s was not an old, settled state exporting its confidence. It was a new regime with a bad birth certificate, and it knew it.

The Second Empire was destroyed at Sedan on 2 September 1870; the Republic was proclaimed in Paris two days later; the war was lost anyway; Paris rose and was put down by Frenchmen in 1871; and the peace took Alsace and much of Lorraine. The assembly elected in February 1871 to make the peace had a monarchist majority, and for four years France had a republic that most of its legislators did not want, kept in being because the royalists could not agree which king. The thing was

settled at Versailles on the evening of 30 January 1875, when Henri Wallon — himself a man of the centre right — got an additional article accepted whose whole content was a piece of plumbing: *« Le Président de la République est élu à la majorité absolue des suffrages par le Sénat et la Chambre des députés réunis en Assemblée nationale. Il est nommé pour sept ans. Il est rééligible. »* It passed by 353 votes to 352. The Senate's own historians point out, fairly, that the story of a republic founded by a single vote is not quite exact, since the full law carrying the article passed by a much wider margin a few weeks later; but the single vote is what happened on the amendment, and the word "République" entered the constitutional law of France on it.

A regime in that position needs its citizens to believe in it, and knows it does not yet have them. Hence the school laws, which are the same men's work in the same years: free primary schooling by the law of 16 June 1881, compulsory schooling for both sexes from six to thirteen by the law of 28 March 1882, and in the second of those a curriculum that begins with *l'instruction morale et civique* and goes on to French, the geography of France, and the history of France — with religious moral instruction removed and a day set aside each week on which the catechism might be taught elsewhere. That is a state taking the formation of its own children away from the Church and running it itself, deliberately and against real resistance, at a cost it did not have to pay.

Hold that fact steady, because it will be needed. In the same decade in which the Third Republic spent heavily to install a common conviction in every French child, it went into the Niger valley and installed one in almost nobody.

### *The coin it could not mint at home*

What such a regime lacks is glory, and there was none to be had in Europe. The lost provinces could not be recovered without a

war France could not win, and any adventure on the continent risked the coalition. The direction left was outward.

The case was made in the Chamber on 28 July 1885 by Jules Ferry, who had been brought down four months earlier over a reverse in Tonkin and was arguing for credits for Madagascar. The passage that survives is the one that pushed the argument past economics:

> *« Il faut dire ouvertement qu'en effet les races supérieures ont un droit vis-à-vis des races inférieures… (Rumeurs sur plusieurs bancs à l'extrême gauche.) Je répète qu'il y a pour les races supérieures un droit, parce qu'il y a un devoir pour elles. Elles ont le devoir de civiliser les races inférieures… »*

It must be said openly that the higher races have a right in respect of the lower races — murmurs on several benches of the far left — I repeat that the higher races have a right, because they have a duty. They have the duty to civilise the lower races.

The interruptions are as much a part of the record as the sentence, and the *Journal officiel* preserved them. A deputy, Joseph Fabre, called out: *« C'est excessif ! Vous aboutissez ainsi à l'abdication des principes de 1789 et de 1848… »* — that is too much; you end by abdicating the principles of 1789 and of 1848. Three days later Clemenceau answered from the same floor. He restated Ferry's thesis in Ferry's own words, and then:

> *« Races supérieures ? races inférieures, c'est bientôt dit ! Pour ma part, j'en rabats singulièrement depuis que j'ai vu des savants allemands démontrer scientifiquement que la France devait être vaincue dans la guerre franco-allemande parce que le Français est d'une race inférieure à l'Allemand. »*

Higher races, lower races — that is easily said. For my part I have come down a good deal since I saw German scholars prove

scientifically that France had to lose the Franco-Prussian war because the Frenchman is of a race inferior to the German.

And at the end, the flattest sentence in the exchange: *« Je ne veux pas juger au fond la thèse qui a été apportée ici et qui n'est pas autre chose que la proclamation de la primauté de la force sur le droit »* — I will not judge on the merits the thesis brought here, which is nothing other than the proclamation of the primacy of force over right.

This is the shape of the difficulty modern Europe had that Rome did not. Rome could conquer barbarians and say so. A republic that dated itself from 1789, that had abolished slavery in 1848, and that was at that moment teaching every French seven-year-old the rights of man out of a state textbook could not simply announce that it was taking a country because it wanted the revenue. The language had to be found. What is worth noticing is that the language was contested in the open, by name, in the chamber, with the stenographers working — and that the credits passed anyway.

### *The Sudan before it was a place*

What did France think it was buying?

The best short answer sits in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* in 1881, in a two-part article by Paul Bourde on the railway schemes then under discussion. Bourde puts the object in one line: *« Que veut-on ? Créer un débouché au Soudan pour ouvrir son immense territoire à notre influence et son riche marché à notre commerce. »* — What is wanted? To create an outlet to the Sudan, in order to open its immense territory to our influence and its rich market to our commerce. And then, more revealingly: *« Dans le Soudan gît notre dernière chance de nous créer un grand empire colonial. »* — In the Sudan lies our last chance of making ourselves a great colonial empire.

Last chance. Not a duty, not a mission; a closing window, in a race, for a prize the writer assumes his readers already want. That is France's position stated by a Frenchman in a mainstream Paris review while the columns were still at the edge of the Senegal.

The striking thing about the rest of Bourde's article is how little anybody knew. A commission had been set up by decree of 13 July 1879, under the public works minister Charles de Freycinet, to study connecting Algeria and Senegal by rail to the interior of the Sudan; it first met on 21 July 1879 and could not agree on where such a line should start, where it should end, or how to survey it. The evidence before it was travellers' reports, hearsay collected from Arab, Tuareg and African informants, and a memoir by a rabbi who had lived at Timbuktu and put the Aulliminden Tuareg at two million souls — a figure Bourde repeats while noting that it is surely exaggerated. Estimates of trade were, in his own word, hypotheses. The rich market that justified the railway was a number nobody had counted.

That is worth holding onto, because it explains something otherwise puzzling about the whole enterprise: the Sudan was not conquered because a careful assessment showed it would pay. It was conquered because a defeated country wanted an empire, a railway lobby wanted a line, and an ancient reputation for gold attached to a place no Frenchman had surveyed.

### *A warrant issued four thousand kilometres from the hand that used it*

The last feature of the French landscape is the one that will run through everything after it.

The advance up the Senegal was made by soldiers who were, in practice, not under control. Gustave Borgnis-Desbordes commanded the upper river from 1880 to 1883, founded the forts at Kita in 1881 and Bamako in 1883, and acquired a reputation for pushing the frontier forward in the absence of

orders and sometimes against them; the ministry that nominally directed him was in Paris, and the governor of Senegal who nominally supervised him often could not find out what he had done until it was done. The historian A. S. Kanya-Forstner, whose study of the conquest is the standard account, sets out the divergence plainly: the ministers who funded the railway were thinking of commercial penetration, while the officers on the river were committed to taking effective control of the middle Niger, and the two purposes were never reconciled. Louis Archinard, appointed to the command in 1888, fought — as one summary of his position has it — on three fronts, against Ahmadu, against Samory, and against a Paris that wanted neither war.

And the force he fought with was not French. The corps of *tirailleurs sénégalais* was created by a decree signed at Plombières-les-Bains on 21 July 1857, at the request of Louis Faidherbe, then governor of Senegal — not, as is often repeated, of French West Africa, which did not exist until much later. Its early ranks were filled substantially by men bought out of slavery from their masters and enlisted for a term of years, alongside sons of defeated chiefs and men taken in war. The recruitment of slaves into the corps continued until 1905.

So the arithmetic of the French side, before a shot in this campaign is fired, reads as follows. A republic fifteen years old and not yet secure in the affections of its own citizens, spending heavily to make French children believe in it, sends into the Niger valley an army of purchased slaves commanded by officers who ignore their government, to take a market whose value it has estimated from hearsay, in a race with Britain, and explains the operation to itself in a language of duty which one of its own leading deputies calls, on the floor of the Chamber, the primacy of force over right.

## What the ground had already decided

Set the two shores together and several things about this colony are settled before it exists.

France wanted the people, not the land. Nothing in the valley invited settlement — no coast, no minerals worth the freight, a climate that killed Europeans — and the whole logic of the enterprise was a market to sell into, a territory to show on a map, and, in time, men to tax and to enlist. That single fact rules out one whole family of colonial violence and makes another one nearly certain. A power that needs the population alive and in place does not clear it; it counts it, taxes it, conscripts it, and objects strenuously when it moves.

France did not find one order to deal with, but several, at different ages. There was a literate Islamic society a thousand years old that no state had ever owned and no conquest had ever displaced, running its own schools, law and calendar out of its own resources. There was a Bambara political world whose ruling class had been built out of slave soldiers over a century and a half and had long since stopped feeling invented. And laid violently across both of them there was a jihad empire not yet thirty years old, still garrisoning its own subjects, already split among its founder’s quarrelling heirs. These were not one thing, and treating them as one is the fastest way to get this study wrong.

Which of them a conqueror can sit down in is not a question about their piety or their antiquity. It is a question about whether anyone in them can deliver obedience he did not personally have to compel. The Tukulor could not reliably deliver it even for themselves. The Bambara aristocracy was defeated and available. The clerics could deliver a great deal and had nothing to gain by handing it over.

And on the other shore, a state facing a version of the same problem at home. The Third Republic in the 1880s was doing,

inside France, the expensive work of installing a conviction in a population that did not yet hold one — schoolhouse by schoolhouse, at real cost, against the Church, for its own children. In the Sudan it would do no such thing. Whether that was thrift, or a judgement about who needed to believe what, is a matter for the modules that follow. What the landscape establishes is that the same government, in the same decade, made two opposite decisions about formation on two sides of a sea, and that the arguments it published about the second were addressed to the readers of the first.

*A note on sources.* The Songhay material is quoted exactly from the *Ta’rīkh as-Sūdān* of Abd al-Rahman al-Sa’di, in Octave Houdas’s French translation published at Paris in 1900 (the Arabic text having appeared in 1898), which is in the public domain; the passages used are from the chapters on Judar’s expedition and its aftermath. One caution: as printed, Houdas renders the pivot of the famous lament as *« le danger fit place à la sécurité; la misère à l’opulence »*, which read literally inverts the plain sense of the passage, and I have therefore quoted only the following clause, *« le trouble, les calamités et la violence succédèrent à la tranquillité »*, whose meaning is not in doubt. The size of Judar’s force is given as al-Sa’di gives it, three thousand fighting men with about twice that number of followers; modern reckonings of the combatant strength cluster between three and four thousand and the wider totals vary considerably, so the figure is offered as a range rather than a count. Mungo Park is quoted from *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa* (London, 1799); he reached Ségou on 20 or 21 July 1796, and reproductions dating the passage to 1795 confuse the year of his departure with the year of his arrival. The parliamentary exchanges are quoted from the *Journal officiel* as reproduced by the Assemblée nationale, Ferry on 28 July 1885 and Clemenceau on 31 July 1885; some reprints date Clemenceau’s speech to 30 July, and I have followed the Assemblée’s own date. The Wallon amendment, its wording and

the division of 353 to 352 on 30 January 1875, and the school laws of 16 June 1881 and 28 March 1882, are taken from the Sénat's and the Assemblée's published texts. Paul Bourde, *La France au Soudan*, appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, third series, volume 43 (1881); both quotations are exact.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and not quoted: A. S. Kanya-Forstner, *The Conquest of the Western Sudan* (1969), for the divergence between the ministers' commercial aims and the officers' territorial ones and for the myth of a Sudanese Eldorado; Martin Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa* (1998), for the categories of servitude, the unreliability of the 1894 and 1904 slave questionnaires, and the judgement that a precise count is not recoverable. No total for the enslaved population is given here, and none should be given later without saying whose estimate it is. The date of the fall of Ségou is given as early April 1890 because sources divide between the fifth and the sixth; the fall of Hamdullahi is given as May 1862 for the same reason.

Two corrections to the working notes that opened this study. The first is that the orders France met on the Niger were not, as expected, a set of long-naturalised Islamic states: the Islamic *society* was old and had fully taken, but the Islamic *states* France fought were new — the Tukulor empire at Ségou was twenty-nine years old when it fell, and Macina had been destroyed by that same empire in 1862 rather than surviving alongside it. The second is smaller: Faidherbe in 1857 was governor of Senegal, not of French West Africa, a federation created decades later, and several popular accounts of the *tirailleurs* decree repeat the anachronism.

One thing was looked for and not found. I expected an explicit French statement from the 1880s describing the Sudan as a reservoir of soldiers, and could not verify one; the frank language of a *force noire* to compensate for French demographic weakness belongs to a later period and to Charles

Mangin’s book of 1910, and it would be a retrojection to put it in the mouths of the men arguing for the railway in 1881. What they said they wanted was a market.

MODULE 1

# TWENTY-SEVEN EUROPEANS

> *Who carried the rifles up the Niger, how many of them there were, out of whose pocket they were paid, and who in the end was giving the orders*

## The column in front of Ouossébougou

On 25 April 1890 a French column halted in front of the earth walls of Ouossébougou, a fortified town in the Bélédougou held for the Tukulor by a commander named Bandiougou Diarra. Ségou had fallen nineteen days earlier, on 6 April, almost without a fight; the guns had opened at a distance and the place was in French hands in about three hours. Ouossébougou was to be different, and everybody on both sides seems to have known it. The Bambara chiefs who had come in with the French had been saying the same thing for weeks, in words a French writer reported without embarrassment: they would not believe in French friendship until the French had broken Ouossébougou.

Here is what the column consisted of. Twenty-seven Europeans. Two hundred and sixty-five African regulars. Two mountain guns. Around them, some thirty African cavalry and — the figure is given loosely in every account, most often as about four thousand — a body of Bambara allies who had come to see the Tukulor destroyed and had their own reasons for it.

The period account of the campaign, published in Paris over the signature G. Valbert, records the arithmetic and the commander's own view of it without any attempt to dress it up: *« C'était peu, le colonel Archinard en convient lui-même, qu'une colonne de 27 Européens et de 265 indigènes de troupe*

*régulière pour aller attaquer une pareille position. Il est vrai qu'on avait avec soi de nombreux auxiliaires ; mais si courageux que soient les Bambaras, ils aiment mieux se réserver pour la poursuite des fuyards et laisser les autres monter à l'assaut. »* — It was little, Colonel Archinard admits it himself, a column of 27 Europeans and 265 native regulars to go and attack such a position. It is true one had numerous auxiliaries with one; but however brave the Bambara may be, they prefer to hold themselves back for the pursuit of fugitives and let the others go up to the assault.

That last clause is the more useful half. The allies were there for the plunder and the chase; the men who went up the wall under fire were the two hundred and sixty-five. The place was carried on the twenty-sixth after a fight through the houses in which, by every account, nobody surrendered; Bandiougou Diarra shut himself in the powder store and fired it, and died there with the people around him.

Hold the composition of that column in view, because it does not change for the next eight years and it is the single most important fact about the conquest of the Niger valley. France took the western Sudan with African soldiers. The Europeans were the officers, the gunners, the doctor, and the men who wrote the reports. Nineteen out of every twenty men who marched, dug, carried and were shot at were African, and a large majority of the ones who were shot at deliberately — the ones sent at walls — were African regulars in French uniform.

## Where the soldiers came from

They were there because of a decree signed at a spa town in the Vosges thirty-three years earlier. In July 1857 Napoleon III put his name to the establishment of a corps of Senegalese riflemen, at the request of the governor of Senegal, Louis Faidherbe, who had reported that he could not get enough men from France to hold what France already had. From the beginning the corps

was filled in three ways. Some were sons of chiefs and men of standing, taken in as under-officers to bind their families in. Some were boatmen and volunteers. And a large share — until the practice was finally stopped in 1905 — were slaves bought from their owners by the French administration, freed on paper, and immediately enlisted for a term of years.

The arrangement had a name and a bookkeeping. A man was purchased; the purchase price was set against his enlistment; he served, commonly for something like a dozen years; at the end he was a free man with a pension claim. Whether this is manumission or a change of owner is a question the French archive does not much dwell on, and it is not necessary to settle it here in order to see what it did: it converted the region's principal form of property into the principal instrument of the region's conquest.

The other half of the recruitment ran the same logic forwards rather than backwards. Men were induced to serve, and allied chiefs induced to supply warriors, by the prospect of taking captives. This is stated flatly in the sources, including by men who approved of the enterprise. Georges Deherme, writing in 1908 in a book meant to explain French West Africa to a French readership, put it as a regrettable custom the officers had picked up: *« il n'était que trop vrai que les officiers en colonne, suivant la coutume du pays, avaient pris la déplorable habitude de distribuer les prisonniers comme captifs à leurs soldats, pour les récompenser et exalter leur dévouement »* — it was only too true that officers in the field, following the custom of the country, had fallen into the deplorable habit of distributing prisoners as captives to their soldiers, to reward them and exalt their devotion.

The administration's own correspondence says the same without the apology. In a letter of 2 August 1894 the governor of the French Sudan refers to his riflemen coming back from the columns *« ramenant des colonnes de prisonniers destinés à*

*devenir leurs captifs* » — bringing back columns of prisoners destined to become their captives. Édouard Guillaumet, who published an account of the Sudan in 1894 the following year, gives an instance with a number: in July 1894, after the defeat of Ali-Kari, chief of Bossé in the Mossi country, the survivors of his village — he puts them at twelve hundred — were divided as spoils among the officers, the legionaries, the regular and irregular riflemen, the grooms and the porters. The historian Denise Bouche, whose study of the freedom villages is the standard one, judged that in the first Sudanese campaigns the prisoners taken by the French were handed over to the riflemen in their entirety.

So the answer to the question of who carried the rifles is: men who had been bought out of slavery, and who were paid in part in slaves.

## Who paid

Paris paid, and paid grudgingly, and then increasingly did not.

The money for the upper Senegal came out of the naval and colonial estimates, voted by a Chamber that had approved the railway from the coast towards the Niger and then found itself funding a war it had not approved. The overruns were routine and by the end of the eighties they had become a scandal in the department: expenditure on the Sudan in 1889 exceeded the sum allotted for it by more than one million four hundred thousand francs, and the ministry responded by imposing austerity and putting an end to what it called the financial fantasy.

The commander on the ground drew the obvious conclusion. If the metropole would not fund the campaigns, the campaigns would have to fund themselves, and the country would have to be made to pay for its own conquest. Two mechanisms did most of the work.

The first was the treasure. There had been talk for thirty years of a hoard at Ségou — gold accumulated by the Bambara kings and inherited by the Tukulor — and it functioned in the argument to Paris as both an objective and a justification. In February 1890, while the case for the advance was still being made, the governor of Senegal telegraphed the ministry that the march on Ségou was urgently required, on the ground that Ahmadu meant to recover his power and his treasures. Ten days after the town fell, Archinard sent his despatch. Digging at nearly two metres, under the direction of a former confidant of Ahmadu, had already produced gold whose value he reported in a range running into the hundreds of thousands of francs. He listed the rest: the banners El Hadj Umar had given to the provinces, Umar's own sabre, quantities of historical objects — and *« toute la bibliothèque de Ségou, soit environ deux mille kilos de livres arabes »*, the entire library of Ségou, some two thousand kilos of Arabic books, together with Ahmadu's correspondence with his son.

Two thousand kilos of manuscripts, weighed like freight, because for the purposes of the despatch that is what they were.

The second mechanism was a tax, and it is the sharpest single document this study has yet found. Across the western Sudan the rulers had long levied a duty called the *oussourou* on caravans entering their territory, payable by traders in slaves as by traders in anything else. France kept it. From the end of the 1890–91 campaigns collection posts were set up at Goumbou, Kassambara, Nioro and Tambakhara, and by general order number 111 of 14 March 1893 Archinard fixed the terms on which it was to be paid. A caravan could pay in cash — twenty francs, or ten thousand cowries — or it could pay in kind. In kind meant one captive in ten.

Having paid, the trader went on his way under French protection. A battalion commander named Quiquandon,

commanding the north-eastern region, set out what this meant in a letter to the governor from Ségou on 4 April 1894:

> *« Moyennant 20 f en effet nous autorisons les dioulas à promener leur bétail humain sur la région placée sous notre autorité, nous autorisons moyennant salaire le commerce de l’esclave qui se traine péniblement sur nos routes pour être vendu comme je l’ai vu par exemple à Médine sur la place qu’on dirait que par ironie on avait appelé « place de la liberté » ainsi que le portait un écriteau placé sur le tronc d’un arbre au pied duquel se seraient accroupis un certain nombre de captifs. »*

For twenty francs we authorise the traders to walk their human cattle about the region placed under our authority; we authorise, for a fee, the trade in the slave who drags himself painfully along our roads to be sold — as I saw for example at Médine, in the square that one would say had been called, in irony, the square of liberty, according to the notice fixed to the trunk of a tree at the foot of which a number of captives were squatting.

The officer is not confessing. He is reporting, to his superior, in the ordinary course of duty, the terms on which his region raises revenue. The sign was on the tree at Médine, which was the oldest French fort on the river, held since the 1850s. The word *liberté* was painted on a board. Underneath it were the captives, and beside them was the receipt for twenty francs.

## Who was giving the orders

The last question is the one that makes this conquest unlike the others in the collection: who decided any of it.

Formally, the chain ran from the Chamber to the minister of marine and colonies, from the minister to the governor of Senegal at Saint-Louis, and from the governor to the commander of the upper river. In practice it did not run at all.

Gustave Borgnis-Desbordes held the upper river from 1880 to 1883, founded the posts at Kita and Bamako, and acquired a reputation for advancing without instructions and occasionally against them. Joseph Gallieni, who commanded from 1886, worked mainly by treaty, signing protectorates with local rulers, and afterwards criticised his successor for preferring the strong hand. The successor was Archinard, who took the command in 1888.

By 1890 the officers of the Sudan were dealing with Paris more or less directly, and Saint-Louis often could not establish what had happened in its own hinterland until afterwards. The pattern was consistent: the commander asked for authority to do a specific thing, obtained it or half-obtained it, and then did considerably more. Valbert, writing for the French public, described the arrangement approvingly and in a phrase that gives the whole game away — the government, he wrote, had understood that he who risks nothing gains nothing when it gave *carte blanche* to the commander of the French Sudan and authorised him, at his own request, to march on Ségou.

The territory was then given a legal existence to fit what the soldiers had already taken. A decree of 18 August 1890 created the French Sudan under a military government, with Archinard as its superior commander; a further decree in October gave that commander charge of the civil services as well; and by a decree of 27 August 1892 the Sudan became an autonomous colony with its capital at Kayes and Archinard as its first governor. The pattern is worth stating plainly: the conquest came first, the decree afterwards, and the decree ratified a fact.

It ended, as such arrangements tend to, when the officer went one step past what could be ratified. Archinard attacked Ahmadu again without authorisation and was removed in November 1893. Paris then did the thing it had been putting off for a decade and sent a civilian: Albert Grodet, the first civil

governor of the French Sudan, who left France in November 1893 and reached Kayes in December.

He was too late by about three weeks. His predecessor's interim successor, Lieutenant-Colonel Eugène Bonnier, had gone to the Sudan in August 1893 with no instructions worth the name, had decided to follow Archinard's advice and take Timbuktu, and was already moving. A naval lieutenant named Boiteux, commanding the gunboats, raced ahead of the column to be first into the city and walked in with four Europeans and some African sailors at the end of December. In his absence the Tuareg attacked the boats he had left behind at the river port of Kabara and killed the officer in charge and fifteen or seventeen of his crew, the count varying by account. Bonnier reached Timbuktu in early January 1894, told Boiteux to his face what he thought of a man who abandoned his boats to be first into a town, confined him to quarters for thirty days, and then marched west towards Goundam.

On the night of 14–15 January 1894 his bivouac at Tacoubao was rushed in the dark by Tuareg of the Tenguérif. The column was destroyed. One officer got out.

## What the record counted

Here is the count, as the French sources give it. Thirteen European officers and non-commissioned officers. Sixty-seven African riflemen. Fourteen guides, interpreters and support staff.

Joffre, then a major of engineers, was sent up to recover the remains and reached the ground in February. Timbuktu was occupied in the process, which is how a disaster produced the objective. And then, over the following two years, a further operation was mounted, whose paper trail survives in the colonial archive at Aix as a dossier of some fourteen documents: correspondence between the minister of colonies and the acting

lieutenant-governor of the Sudan through the autumn of 1895; a letter from the president of a society for the upkeep of soldiers' and sailors' graves; a letter from Archinard in November 1895 making severe accusations against Grodet; a speech delivered at Timbuktu on 24 January 1896 at the raising of the bodies; an order of 24 February 1896 to exhume them; and a speech at Dakar on the departure of the coffins for France.

The file is described, in the finding aid, as concerning the transfer to France of the bodies of the officers and non-commissioned officers killed at Tacoubao.

## What this part of the story shows

Four things, stated plainly.

France conquered the Niger valley with an army that was overwhelmingly African, in a proportion of roughly twenty to one, and the men who died taking the walls died in French uniform for French wages under French officers whose names are recorded. This is not a curiosity or a footnote about auxiliaries. It is the mechanism. A power four thousand kilometres away with no intention of sending its own conscripts to die of dysentery on the upper Senegal could not have taken this country any other way, and knew it.

The wages were partly paid in people. The soldiers had in many cases been bought out of slavery to enlist, and were rewarded after a successful action with captives of their own; the administration knew this, wrote it down in its ordinary correspondence, and continued it. The same administration taxed the slave caravans at one head in ten and issued the receipts, at a fort where a sign in a public square said *liberté*.

The men who decided where the columns went were not in Paris and did not consult it. They asked for one thing and did three, presented the result as accomplished, and were confirmed by decree afterwards — until one of them went far

enough that the government had to remove him and send a civilian, whereupon his replacement, arriving with no instructions, immediately did the same thing and lost his column doing it.

And the record of what all this cost was kept with great precision on one side of a line and not at all on the other. Thirteen Europeans were exhumed, carried nine hundred kilometres to the river, shipped to Dakar with a speech, and buried in France. Sixty-seven riflemen and fourteen interpreters and guides were killed on the same ground on the same morning. The archive file is about the officers and non-commissioned officers.

*A note on sources.* The strength of the Ouossébougou column — twenty-seven Europeans and two hundred and sixty-five African regulars — and Archinard's own admission that it was slight, together with the remark about the Bambara auxiliaries preferring the pursuit to the assault and the statement that the government gave the commander *carte blanche*, are quoted exactly from the contemporary account published over the signature G. Valbert, *Le Sultan Ahmadou et la campagne du colonel Archinard dans le Soudan français*, in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*; the text is out of copyright and reproduced on Wikisource. Other accounts add about thirty native cavalry and put the Bambara contingent at around four thousand; that last figure is an approximation in every source that gives it and is offered as such. Georges Deherme is quoted exactly from *L'Afrique occidentale française* (Paris, 1908) and Édouard Guillaumet from *Le Soudan en 1894* (Paris, 1895), both in the public domain and both on Gallica.

The two archival letters — the governor's of 2 August 1894 on prisoners destined to become the riflemen's captives, and chef de bataillon Quiquandon's of 4 April 1894 from Ségou on the *oussourou* and the square at Médine — are French colonial administrative documents held at the national archives of Mali; I

have not seen the originals and quote them as transcribed in Abdramane Traoré's study of the civilising principles in the western Sudan, which cites them by call number, and I record that dependence rather than pass the transcription off as my own reading. The terms of general order number 111 of 14 March 1893, one captive in ten or twenty francs or ten thousand cowries, come from the same source. The overspend of more than 1,400,000 francs on the 1889 Sudan budget, the governor of Senegal's telegram of February 1890, and Archinard's despatch of 16 April 1890 listing the gold, the sabre and the two thousand kilos of Arabic books are quoted as reproduced in the scholarly literature on the Ségou treasure; the sum recovered by digging is given in that despatch as a range and I have not narrowed it. The Tacoubao casualties — thirteen European officers and non-commissioned officers, sixty-seven African riflemen, fourteen auxiliaries — and the 1895–96 dossier on the transfer of the bodies are taken from the published inventory of the colonial archives and from the secondary literature that cites the surviving officer's report. The number killed with the boats at Kabara at the end of December 1893 is given as fifteen in some accounts and seventeen in others.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and not quoted: A. S. Kanya-Forstner, *The Conquest of the Western Sudan* (1969); Martin Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa* (1998), for the practice of purchase and enlistment and for Archinard's turn to local revenue; Denise Bouche, *Les villages de liberté en Afrique noire française* (1968), for the judgement that prisoners were handed to the riflemen in their entirety in the early campaigns.

Two things were set aside. The naval doctor Paul Vigné d'Octon left a much-quoted line about seeing the courtyard of the Bamako post filled with women and children distributed to the troops; his original text of 1900 is out of copyright but the version in circulation is a 1984 reprint, and rather than quote a

wording I could not check against the original I have left it out, noting only that a French medical officer who served in the Sudan made the claim in print. I also looked for an establishment table giving the total strength of the Sudanese riflemen year by year, and found only fragments — a decree of 9 August 1893 raising the regiment to twelve companies and another of 29 August creating a second squadron of native cavalry. A proper table exists in the military records and should be run down before any total is asserted.

One correction to the notes this study opened with. The occupation of Timbuktu is there dated to about 1894; the first Frenchmen walked into the city at the end of December 1893 and the column entered in early January 1894, and the reason the date is confusing is that the occupation was not an operation but the consequence of a defeat. Ségou is given in some accounts as falling on 5 April 1890 and in the French narratives consistently as 6 April; I have used the latter.

MODULE 2

# VACANT AND WITHOUT A MASTER

> *How the taking was written down — the treaties that bound one side for ever and the other until it changed its mind, the decree that made the state the owner of everything unclaimed, and the men who were handed kingdoms for services rendered*

## Why the paper had to exist

A column takes a town in an afternoon. The question that arises the next morning is what the column now owns, and by what right, and it is not a philosophical question. It is a question about whether the men in Paris who vote the money, and the men in London who are drawing their own lines on the same continent, will treat the afternoon as having settled anything.

In an older world the answer would have been supplied by God: the land was the king’s because the Almighty had put him there, and the priest who crowned him said so. The France of the 1890s could not use that answer and did not want it. Its entire domestic order rested on a different foundation, and a recent one — that what a man owns, he owns because the law says so, and the law says so because the nation, through its deputies, has enacted it. Every farm in the Beauce, every share certificate, every title deed in France descended from that proposition. A Frenchman who doubted it doubted the ground under his own house.

So the seizure of the Niger valley had to be turned into law, and turned into law in a form the metropole would recognise as law. This is worth stating without cynicism, because the cynical reading misses how the thing actually worked. The paper was not a fig leaf that anybody could see through. It was the

instrument that made the seizure real *in France* — that allowed a deputy to vote credits for the Sudan without believing he was voting for brigandage, that allowed a court in Bordeaux to enforce a contract about Sudanese produce, that allowed a family in Marseille to insure a cargo. The words did a job, and the job was mostly done at home.

They were also addressed outward. The Berlin conference had met in the winter of 1884–85 and the general scramble was on; a claim in Africa was worth what other Europeans would concede, and other Europeans conceded to documents. And they were addressed, last and least, to the people whose country was being described in them.

Three audiences, in that order of importance. Watch what the documents say and to whom, and the order becomes visible.

## The treaties

The first instrument was the protectorate treaty, and France made them by the hundred.

Consider one closely. In 1880 a young marine infantry captain named Joseph Gallieni went up the Niger to Nango, near Ségou, to negotiate with Ahmadu, who was then the ruler of the Tukulor empire. He was, on his own account, effectively held there for nine months. A treaty was finally signed on 10 March 1881, drawn up in duplicate, in Arabic and in French. Article 6 of the French text read: *« Le Niger est placé sous le protectorat français depuis ses sources jusqu'à Tombouctou, dans la partie qui baigne les possessions du sultan »* — the Niger is placed under French protection from its sources to Timbuktu, in the portion that washes the sultan's possessions.

When Gallieni got back to Saint-Louis, it was noticed — the period account puts it exactly this way — that the Arabic text of the treaty differed from the French on several essential points.

That sentence is the whole business laid bare, and what makes it useful is that it is not an accusation by a modern historian. It is a French writer, in a French periodical, telling French readers what the French administration discovered when it compared its own two copies. Two documents, one signature ceremony, two different agreements, and the one that got filed in Paris as title to the upper Niger was the French one.

Six years later Gallieni, by then a lieutenant-colonel and commanding the Sudan, concluded another treaty with the same man. Its second article is the most instructive single paragraph this study has yet turned up:

> *« Le sultan Ahmadou, confiant dans la grandeur et dans l'esprit de justice du gouvernement de la République, place ses Etats présents et à venir sous le protectorat de la France. Le commandant supérieur s'engage dès lors, au nom du gouvernement, à ne jamais faire la guerre au sultan, à ne jamais envoyer ses colonnes contre lui, à ne bâtir aucun fort ou établissement armé dans les pays où se trouvent des représentants officiels du sultan.*
>
> *Cette dernière clause du traité deviendra nulle, si le commandant supérieur n'a pu obtenir justice pour des pillages commis dans les Etats du sultan sur des commerçants ou traitants français. Il reprendra alors toute sa liberté d'action et se fera justice lui-même. »*

The sultan Ahmadu, confident in the greatness and the spirit of justice of the government of the Republic, places his present and future states under the protection of France. The superior commander thereupon undertakes, in the name of the government, never to make war on the sultan, never to send his columns against him, and to build no fort or armed establishment in the countries where the sultan's official representatives are found.

This last clause of the treaty shall become void if the superior commander has been unable to obtain satisfaction for pillages

committed in the sultan’s states upon French merchants or traders. He shall then resume his entire freedom of action and do himself justice.

Read the two paragraphs in order and the machinery is exposed without any need to comment on it. Ahmadu gives up something permanent and unconditional: not only the states he holds but the states he may come to hold, *présents et à venir*, which is to say his future as well as his present. In exchange he receives three promises — no war, no columns, no forts — and then, in the next sentence, the conditions under which all three evaporate, the judge of whether those conditions have been met being the superior commander himself, who will thereupon do himself justice.

One party is bound for ever. The other is bound until it decides it is not. That is not a flaw in the drafting; it is the drafting.

The same formula, with local variations, runs through the series. The treaties concluded with Samory Touré in 1887 and 1888 have him place himself, *« ses héritiers qui sont dans l’ordre de primogéniture »*, and his present and future states under French protection — a European rule of succession written into a West African polity by men who had no authority over its succession and no intention of respecting it. The 1887 treaty with Ahmadu also provided that France would pay him an annual indemnity on the gum harvested in his states and sold to French merchants, payable in quarters on 1 March, 1 April, 1 May and 15 June: the ruler of the middle Niger reduced, on paper, to a commission agent on his own country’s exports, paid on French quarter-days.

And then in 1897 a French jurist, Edgard Rouard de Card, gathered the protectorate treaties France had concluded in Africa between 1870 and 1895 and published them in one volume in Paris. Ask who that book was for. Not the signatories, most of whom could not read it and several of whom were by

then dead or in exile. It was for the chancelleries, the courts, the ministries and the disputes with Britain. The treaties had become what they were always meant to become: evidence, in a European library, of a European title.

The test of what the words were worth came quickly enough. France undertook in May 1887 never to send its columns against Ahmadu. Its columns took Ségou in April 1890.

## Turning it into French law

At home the conquest was regularised in the ordinary way, by decree, and always afterwards.

On 18 August 1890 — four months after Ségou fell — a report went to the President of the Republic and a decree created the French Sudan, under military government, with the commander of the columns as its superior commander. In October the same commander was given charge of the civil services. On 27 August 1892 a further decree made the Sudan an autonomous colony with its capital at Kayes, and the officer who had taken it became its first governor.

Nothing in this sequence is unusual and that is the point of noticing it. The decrees do not authorise anything; they describe as accomplished a thing that was accomplished by other means, and in describing it they make it lawful. A French deputy reading the *Journal officiel* in the autumn of 1890 encountered the French Sudan as an administrative fact with a governor and a budget line, which is a very different object from a valley in which two hundred and sixty-five African riflemen had gone up a wall in April.

## What the local elites got

Now the settlement proper: who was given what.

Almost nothing was given in land. This is the first thing that distinguishes the Sudan from the settler colonies and it needs stating plainly, because it shapes everything downstream. There were no French farmers to plant. The country was landlocked, remote and unhealthy for Europeans, and the European interest in it was trade, transit and prestige. What France had to distribute, therefore, was not acres. It was offices, revenue, and people.

The offices were manufactured. At Ségou, after the town fell, a member of the old Bambara ruling family, Mari Diarra, was installed; he objected to the boundaries of the territory he had been given and was shot on 29 May 1890, a matter of weeks later. He was replaced by Bodian Coulibaly, a Bambara from the Kaarta, who had not ruled at Ségou and whose family had not ruled there for thirty years.

The clearest case is Sansanding. On 7 March 1891, in the words of a French account published forty years later and still admiring, *« le colonel Archinard donnait l'investiture du royaume de Sansanding, créé par le démembrement de l'empire d'Ahmadou vaincu, à un employé des télégraphes, qui devenait le fama Mademba-Sy »* — Colonel Archinard gave the investiture of the kingdom of Sansanding, created by the dismemberment of the defeated empire of Ahmadu, to a telegraph employee, who thereby became the fama Mademba-Sy.

Take the sentence apart. The kingdom was created — the word is the French writer's — by dismembering somebody else's. The man invested with it was Mademba Sy, born at Saint-Louis in Senegal in 1852, a clerk in the posts and telegraphs who had been given the job of running the telegraph line up the Sudan and had made himself indispensable to the officers. He had no claim of descent at Sansanding, no local following, and no army but the one his patrons lent him. What he had was the confidence of the men with the guns, and *fama* is the Bambara word for king.

He held it until his death in 1918. In 1899 he was placed under house arrest at Kayes on accusations that included abuse of power, ritual killings, rape and extortion; he was cleared and restored to his throne. The historian Richard Roberts, who has written the fullest study of the case, treats the affair as a demonstration of how far the rule of law bent when a useful collaborator was in the dock, and that judgement is his and worth reading in full.

The third pattern was to buy a man out of the family you were destroying. Aguibou Tall was a son of Umar Tall and a brother of Ahmadu; he had ruled at Dinguiraye, went over to the French, and in May 1893 was installed by Archinard as sultan of Macina at Bandiagara — placed by his family's enemy on a throne taken from his own brother. He held the position until 1902 and died at Bandiagara in 1907.

Notice what all three men received, and what none of them received. They received an office, a share of the revenue, and, in the campaign years, a share of the captives. They did not receive land, or an army of their own, or any title France could not withdraw by the same instrument that had granted it. Mari Diarra's fate at Ségou established the terms within seven weeks of the conquest and nobody afterwards can have misunderstood them.

## The sentence that took the country

The land itself was dealt with later, and in one line.

By a decree of 23 October 1904 organising the domain in French West Africa, article 10 provided:

> *« Les terres vacantes et sans maître, dans les colonies et territoires de l'Afrique occidentale française, appartiennent à l'État. »*

Vacant and ownerless lands, in the colonies and territories of French West Africa, belong to the State.

Fourteen words in French. The phrasing is not colonial invention; it is lifted from the Napoleonic Civil Code, whose articles on property without an owner assign such property to the public domain. It was written for a settled European countryside where every field had a proprietor and the rule caught the occasional estate whose owner had died without heirs. Applied to the Niger valley it did something entirely different, and the difference lies wholly in the word *vacant*.

Land in this region was worked in ways that leave it empty for years at a time. Fields are cultivated and then rested; pasture is used seasonally by herders who are elsewhere for months; rights are held by lineages, by villages, by first-clearers, by whoever the land chief recognises, in overlapping layers that no register anywhere recorded. None of that produced a document. An administrator standing in a fallow field in the dry season, holding a code drafted in Paris in 1804, was looking at land that was vacant and had no master, and by article 10 it belonged to the State.

The decree did make provision for the rest. Land held collectively by natives, or held by native chiefs as representatives of native collectivities, could not be sold or leased to private persons without the approval of the lieutenant-governor in council; and where such land was needed for towns or public works, the occupation was to be pronounced by the same lieutenant-governor in council, who would also rule on what compensation the occupation might warrant. Read that carefully too. The land is acknowledged. The people on it are not the ones who decide whether they keep it, or what it is worth, or whether anything is owed. The same official does all three.

The system was completed by registration. A further decree of 24 July 1906 organised landed property on the model France had been using in Tunisia and elsewhere: a title became secure

by being entered in a register kept by a *conservateur de la propriété foncière*, appointed by order of the governor-general. Registration was open in principle to Africans. It was expensive, conducted in French, and required a claim of a kind the customary system did not generate, and it was used almost entirely by Europeans and by a handful of the coastal educated. Everyone else went on farming under an arrangement the law described as an occupancy tolerated by the owner, the owner being the State.

Thirty-one years later the rule was tightened rather than loosened. A decree of 15 November 1935 restated that vacant and ownerless lands belonged to the State and added to them any land not covered by a regular title of ownership or enjoyment which had been unexploited or unoccupied for more than ten years. By then the State had a use for land it had not previously had, and a reason to define fallow as abandonment.

## What happened to slave property

One more class of property has to be accounted for, because in this country it was the largest.

The men France defeated held wealth mainly in people, and so did the men France installed. What the settlement did about that was, for the first fifteen years, nothing that reduced it. The caravan duty on slave traders was kept and collected, in cash or in captives. Prisoners taken by the columns were distributed to the soldiers and the allied chiefs. The old masters were not dispossessed, and the men France made kings were given establishments that included slaves.

The trade was formally suppressed only by a decree of 12 December 1905, which punished any agreement or preliminary to an agreement aimed at alienating another person’s liberty with two to five years’ imprisonment and a fine. It did not touch domestic slavery — the status of people born in a master’s

household — which was addressed instead by a policy of allowing anyone who wished to leave to leave. In the northern districts even that was not applied evenly: the administration, unwilling to provoke the desert populations whose submission it regarded as fragile, let masters there keep people who wished to go.

What the freed received at this stage is a subject for later; the short answer is a village, French supervision, and an obligation to supply porters and labour. What the masters received was time.

## What the settlement teaches

The instruments were addressed to Frenchmen and to other Europeans, and they were drafted accordingly. A treaty whose two texts said different things could still function perfectly as title, because the audience that mattered read only one of them. A book of treaties published in Paris in 1897 was evidence in a European argument. A decree of August 1890 turned a set of accomplished facts into a colony with a budget line. None of these documents needed to convince a single person living on the Niger, and none of them tried.

Where an obligation ran towards France it was unconditional and permanent. Where it ran the other way it carried its own release clause in the following sentence, and France judged whether the clause had been triggered. A promise never to send columns against a man is worth exactly what the promiser’s own assessment of provocation is worth, and three years later the columns went.

What was distributed was office rather than land, because there was no European demand for land here. That made the collaborators cheaper to install and far easier to remove: a man given a kingdom that was created by decree can have it uncreated by decree, and the one who objected to his

boundaries at Ségou was dead within seven weeks. It also meant that the men who accepted these positions were, from the first day, holding something they did not own.

And the land itself was taken by a sentence borrowed from a code written for the French countryside, whose key word meant one thing in the Beauce and another in the inland delta. There was no confiscation, no expropriation order, no seizure to protest against. There was a definition. Land that nobody could produce a paper for was land without a master, and land without a master belonged to the State, and the State was France.

*A note on sources.* The Nango treaty of 10 March 1881, its execution in Arabic and French in duplicate, the wording of article 6 of the French text, and the discovery at Saint-Louis that the Arabic text differed on several essential points are taken exactly from the period article *Sénégal et Soudan français*, out of copyright and reproduced on Wikisource; the snippet available to me breaks off immediately after the statement of divergence, so I can report that the French administration found the two texts to differ on essential points but cannot yet say which points, and that gap should be closed from the full article before this is built upon. Gallieni's own narrative, *Voyage au Soudan français (Haut-Niger et pays de Ségou), 1879-1881* (Paris, 1885), is public domain and available; it has been used here only for the fact of the long detention at Nango and should be read entire before Module 3.

The 1887 treaty with Ahmadu is quoted exactly from a transcription of the French text. Two cautions. The transcription carries obvious scanning errors elsewhere in the document and numbers two consecutive articles as "Art. 3", so the passage quoted here as the second article is identified by its position, not by its printed number. And the heading dates the treaty to 12 May 1887 at Kayes while the subscription reads *Fait à Gouri, le 11 mai 1887*; I have not been able to reconcile the two and give both. The Samory treaties of 1887–88, with their reference to

heirs in the order of primogeniture and to present and future states, are quoted from the same body of transcribed texts, which correspond to the treaties collected in Edgard Rouard de Card, *Les traités de protectorat conclus par la France en Afrique, 1870-1895* (Paris, 1897), itself out of copyright and available on Wikisource. Where the phrasing here matters it should be checked against Rouard de Card's printed text.

Article 10 of the decree of 23 October 1904 organising the domain in French West Africa is quoted exactly, as are the substance of its provisions on collectively held land and on occupation for public purposes; the text is reproduced in the *Recueil Dareste* for 1905 and quoted in the modern legal-historical literature on colonial property. The derivation of the phrase from articles 538, 539 and 713 of the Civil Code is the standard account in that literature and is paraphrased, not quoted. Article 1 of the decree of 15 November 1935, extending the rule to land unexploited or unoccupied for more than ten years, is quoted from a published text of the decree. The registration system and the office of *conservateur de la propriété foncière* rest on the decree of 24 July 1906 and its 1932 revision.

The investiture of Mademba Sy on 7 March 1891 is quoted exactly from the *Bulletin du Comité d'Études Historiques et Scientifiques de l'Afrique Occidentale Française* for 1931; other accounts date the appointment to 1890, and since Ségou fell in April 1890 and the kingdom was carved out of the conquest, both may be describing different stages of the same process. His birth at Saint-Louis in 1852, his telegraph career, the 1899 charges and his restoration are drawn from Richard Roberts's biography, *Mademba Sèye (1879-1918), fama de Sansanding* (2021), which is modern scholarship and is paraphrased with credit rather than quoted. Aguibou Tall's installation at Bandiagara in May 1893 and his tenure to 1902 are taken from the standard reference literature; the exact date of the

investiture is given in one source as 4 May 1893 and I have not confirmed it independently.

Two things were looked for and not found. I could find no evidence of significant land concessions to European individuals or companies in the French Sudan in this period, which is consistent with everything else about the colony but is an argument from absence and should be checked against the concession registers before it is asserted as a finding. And I have not established what, if anything, the treaties' African signatories were told the documents said; the divergence between the two Nango texts makes that the sharpest unanswered question in this module, and it may be answerable from Gallieni's own account.

One correction. It is often said that the treaties were signed by men who could not read them. In this valley that is too simple: Ahmadu and Samory both commanded literate secretariats working in Arabic, which is precisely why the Nango treaty was executed in two languages, and precisely why the divergence between the two texts is a finding rather than an accident.

MODULE 3

# THE HIDEOUS AFRICAN SORE

> *The story the conquest told about itself — the crusade against slavery that Paris and Rome could agree on, the restored dynasty that Ségou was offered, and what each of them was for*

## Who the story is for

Force is expensive and has to be reapplied. A story about why the force was right is cheap and, if it takes, does the work by itself. Every conquest that lasts long enough to be written about produces one, and the writers are usually sincere. The scholar of Timbuktu who explained the Moroccan invasion of 1591 as God’s judgement on a dynasty that had fallen into drinking and worse was not composing propaganda for a paymaster; he was a working jurist making sense of a catastrophe he had lived through, and the explanation he reached for happened also to be the one that made the new masters legitimate.

But a colonial story has an audience problem the ordinary kind does not have. The people being conquered are not going to be persuaded and do not have to be, because the columns are already there. The people whose belief actually matters are four thousand kilometres away: the deputies who vote the credits, the taxpayers who fund them, the newspaper readers who decide whether a government survives an African reverse, and the young men who volunteer for the marine infantry. That is where nearly the whole effort goes.

There is one exception, and the Sudan supplies a clean case of it. Where a conqueror needs local men to fight for him, and needs local rulers to collect for him afterwards, he has to give

those men a reason that will pass in their own terms — and that reason is a genuine piece of work, addressed to people who can check it against what they see.

France ran both stories in the Niger valley. They were different stories. They were not aimed at each other's audiences, and the audiences never met.

## The crusade

The story told at home was that France had come to end slavery.

Its beginnings were not French and not secular. In May 1888 Leo XIII issued the encyclical *In plurimis*, condemning slavery; and later that month he asked Charles Lavigerie, cardinal archbishop of Algiers and primate of Africa, to take up the cause. Lavigerie dropped everything else. On 1 July 1888 he preached at Saint-Sulpice in Paris, opening the campaign; on 31 July he spoke at the Prince's Hall in London, at a meeting chaired by a former British foreign secretary and attended by the archbishop of Westminster; on 15 August he preached at Sainte-Gudule in Brussels. He wrote to Bismarck. He preached in Naples and Rome.

The word used for it, in the Catholic literature that popularised the campaign for French readers, was *croisade*, and the connection was made explicitly. One such book, published to explain the movement to a Belgian and French audience, told its readers that the Church, faithful to its traditions, had been in the Middle Ages the instigator of the Crusades against Mohammedan tyranny, and that Leo XIII was the promoter of the present African crusade.

Hold that sentence next to the map. The slave-raiding powers of the western Sudan against which French columns were then advancing — Ahmadu's empire, Samory's — were Muslim states founded by holy war. The crusade framing did not have to be manufactured to fit the Sudan. It fitted.

The campaign produced a treaty. The powers met at Brussels from 18 November 1889 and signed a General Act on 2 July 1890. Its preamble declares them animated by the firm will to put an end to the crimes and devastation engendered by the African slave trade, to protect effectively the aboriginal populations of Africa, and to assure to that vast continent *« les bienfaits de la paix et de la civilisation »* — the benefits of peace and of civilisation.

Then comes the first article, which sets out what the signatories declare to be the most effective means of fighting the trade in the interior of Africa. The list is worth reading slowly:

> *« Organisation progressive des services administratifs, judiciaires, religieux et militaires dans les territoires d'Afrique placés sous la souveraineté ou le protectorat des nations civilisées ;*
>
> *Établissement graduel, à l'intérieur, par les puissances de qui relèvent les territoires, de stations fortement occupées, de manière que leur action protectrice ou répressive puisse se faire sentir avec efficacité dans les territoires dévastés par les chasses à l'homme ;*
>
> *Construction de routes et notamment de voies ferrées reliant les stations avancées à la côte… »*

Progressive organisation of administrative, judicial, religious and military services in the territories of Africa placed under the sovereignty or protection of the civilised nations. Gradual establishment, in the interior, by the powers to whom the territories belong, of strongly occupied stations, so that their protective or repressive action may be effectively felt in the territories devastated by man-hunting. Construction of roads and notably of railways linking the forward stations to the coast.

An administration, a garrison network, and a railway. Those are the three things a European power building a colony in the interior of Africa needs, and here they are, listed as the means

of suppressing the slave trade, in a treaty drafted and signed by the powers building the colonies. Nothing in the article is false — an administration and a garrison and a railway will in fact make slave-raiding harder — and that is exactly what makes it work. The instrument does not disguise the conquest. It baptises it.

The dates sit close together. Ségou fell on 6 April 1890. The General Act was signed on 2 July.

## The one story a divided France could sign

There is something in this that a study of French politics in these years should stop over, because it is not obvious and it explains a good deal about why this particular story was chosen.

France in 1890 was in the middle of a bitter fight between the Republic and the Church, and the battlefield was the child. The laws of 1881 and 1882 had made primary schooling free and compulsory and had taken religious instruction out of it, replacing moral teaching by the priest with moral and civic instruction by the State. Both sides understood the stakes exactly. The men who had passed those laws and the men who preached against them did not agree about the nature of France.

They agreed about the Niger. A cardinal preached the crusade from a Paris pulpit; a republican ministry sent columns and voted credits; an anticlerical Chamber ratified a treaty whose first article proposed the progressive organisation of *religious* services in Africa. Each got something. The Church got a mission field and a moral victory in a country where it was losing. The Republic got a justification for an expensive war that its own left could not easily attack without seeming to defend slavers.

The military men used the same coin without embarrassment. When Gallieni published his account of the Niger mission in

1885 he dedicated it to Brière de l'Isle, the former governor of Senegal, and listed among the achievements of his governorship *« la hideuse plaie africaine, l'esclavage, combattue par vous sans relâche »* — the hideous African sore, slavery, fought by you without respite. And the language was still doing duty a generation later, when the colony had long been quiet. A circular of 1 February 1901 from the permanent delegate of the governor-general in the territories of the upper Senegal and middle Niger, William Ponty, opens: *« N'oublions pas que c'est au nom de la liberté et pour combattre les coutumes barbares que les puissances européennes sont venues dans les territoires de l'Afrique »* — let us not forget that it is in the name of liberty and to combat barbarous customs that the European powers came into the territories of Africa.

He is writing to his own officials, in an internal circular, sixteen years after the crusade began. That is what a story looks like once it has been fully installed in the people who administer it: not a line for the newspapers, but the thing an official says to another official to remind him what they are both doing.

## The story told at Ségou

The other story was told on the ground, and it was not about slavery at all. It was about restoration.

The plan for the 1890 campaign, as it was described afterwards to French readers, was to strike a thousand kilometres from base, take Ségou, and — the phrase is the period writer's — restore in that kingdom *« les anciens maîtres Bambaras qui en avaient été chassés par Omar-El-Hadj »*, the ancient Bambara masters who had been driven out of it by Umar Tall.

This was a coherent thing to say and it had the enormous advantage of being largely true. Ségou had been a Bambara kingdom for something like a century and a half. Umar's army

had taken it in 1861 and his son had garrisoned it ever since, imposing conversion on a population that had not sought it. There were Bambara who wanted the Tukulor gone, and they had said so, and thousands of them marched with the French columns. When Archinard promised them their throne back he was offering something they actually wanted, in terms that made sense inside their own account of who ought to rule at Ségou.

The ceremony was held. On 11 April 1890, five days after the town fell, a French captain sat down with the Bambara chiefs in formal palaver, and Mari Diarra, of the old royal line, was placed on the throne of Ségou.

He was killed on 29 May, with twenty-three of his counsellors, on the strength of an alleged plot. He had lasted seven weeks. His offence, so far as the record shows, was objecting to how much of the kingdom he had been given. His replacement was Bodian Coulibaly, a Bambara from the Kaarta whose family had not ruled at Ségou. A slice of the same territory had meanwhile been detached and handed to a former telegraph clerk from Saint-Louis, who had no claim there of any kind, and who was invested with it as king the following March.

And what had gone out with the columns, along with the gold, was the library: two thousand kilos of Arabic manuscripts, listed in the commander’s despatch among the objects taken from the palace. The kingdom was restored and its archive was shipped to France.

## What was said to the Muslims

That leaves the largest question in this module, and I can only half answer it.

France was now governing a population containing a great many Muslims, with a written law, a scholarly class, a court system and schools, and no colonial power ever managed such a

population without deciding what to say to it. The treaties themselves show the register in which French officers addressed Muslim rulers when they still needed them: the 1887 agreement has Ahmadu placing his states under French protection *« confiant dans la grandeur et dans l'esprit de justice du gouvernement de la République »* — confident in the greatness and the spirit of justice of the government of the Republic — which is the language of one dignity acknowledging another, drafted by the French side.

But that is a treaty preamble, not a policy toward the governed. Whether France in the 1890s made any real effort to speak to the Muslims of the Niger as it later did — through a managed and closely watched Islamic establishment, through subsidised schools, through the promotion of one brotherhood against another — I have not been able to establish from sources I can verify, and the developed apparatus of Islamic policy in French West Africa belongs to the years after 1900 and to a different part of this study. What can be said here is narrower and worth saying: the restoration story France told at Ségou was addressed to the Bambara, who were not Muslims, and it was a story in which the Muslim conquerors were the usurpers. That choice of audience is itself the finding.

## The receipts

Set the story beside the ledger and lay them out in order.

The powers declared at Brussels in July 1890 that the most effective means of ending the slave trade in the interior were an administration, occupied stations and a railway. France built all three. It also kept the duty that the defeated rulers had charged slave caravans, fixed the rate by general order in March 1893 at twenty francs, or ten thousand cowries, or one captive in ten, and set up collection posts to take it. A trader who paid moved his people under French protection. Prisoners taken by the columns were distributed to the riflemen and to the allied chiefs

as their reward, which the administration recorded in its ordinary correspondence and a French author explained to French readers as a regrettable habit picked up from the country. At Médine, the oldest French fort on the river, the square where captives waited to be sold carried a board nailed to a tree, and the word painted on the board was *liberté*.

The trade was abolished in the French Sudan by decree on 12 December 1905.

## What the two stories teach

The story that did the heavy lifting was the one told in France, and it was chosen for what it could carry there rather than for what it described. It was the only proposition on which a republic fighting the Church over the schools and a cardinal preaching a crusade could stand together, which made it the cheapest available legitimation for an expensive war. It also had the rare property of being unfalsifiable in the right direction: the enemy really did raid for slaves, so every campaign confirmed the story regardless of what the campaign did.

The instrument that most repays reading is the Brussels Act, because it is not hypocrisy in the ordinary sense. Its first article does not conceal the administration, the garrisons and the railway. It prescribes them, by name, as the remedy. A power that wanted those three things for other reasons had only to sign, and had thereby converted its whole programme into a humanitarian obligation undertaken before the other powers of Europe.

The story told at Ségou was a different object doing a different job. It was aimed at people who could check it, it had to be substantially true to work, and it worked — thousands of Bambara marched. What it bought was the manpower for the assault and a way of describing the conquest, at home as well as on the Niger, as the ending of a usurpation. What it cost the men

who believed it can be read off a calendar. The restored king was enthroned on 11 April and killed on 29 May, and the kingdom he had been restored to was administered directly within three years.

*A note on sources.* The Brussels General Act of 2 July 1890 is quoted exactly from the French text, which is out of copyright and reproduced on Wikisource; the passages used are from the preamble and from the first article's enumeration of means. The dates of the conference, 18 November 1889 to 2 July 1890, and the list of signatory powers are from the same source and from the published protocols of the French foreign ministry, available on Gallica. Leo XIII's encyclical *In plurimis* of May 1888, Lavigerie's sermon at Saint-Sulpice on 1 July 1888, his London address of 31 July and his Brussels sermon of 15 August are established from the collected documents of the anti-slavery work published under Lavigerie's name, on Gallica, and from the standard reference literature. The characterisation of the campaign as a crusade in the tradition of the medieval crusades against Mohammedan tyranny is quoted in substance from a contemporary Catholic popularisation, Alexis-M. Gochet's volume on the African missions and the anti-slavery movement, also on Gallica; that text is badly scanned and I have rendered the sense rather than attempting a word-for-word quotation of a corrupt line.

Gallieni's dedication to Brière de l'Isle, with the phrase about the hideous African sore, is quoted exactly from *Voyage au Soudan français (Haut-Niger et pays de Ségou), 1879-1881* (Paris, Hachette, 1885), public domain. William Ponty's circular of 1 February 1901 is quoted from the colonial archives as transcribed and cited by call number in Abdramane Traoré's study of the civilising principles in the western Sudan; I have not seen the original and record the dependence.

The description of Archinard's plan as the restoration of the ancient Bambara masters driven out by Umar is quoted exactly

from the contemporary account published over the signature G. Valbert in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, out of copyright. The palaver held with the Bambara chiefs on 11 April 1890 is an archival document in the Senegalese national archives, cited in the scholarly literature on the Ségou treasure; the enthronement of Mari Diarra and his killing with twenty-three of his counsellors on 29 May 1890 are given consistently in the Malian and French secondary literature. The contents of the commander's despatch of 16 April 1890, including the two thousand kilos of Arabic manuscripts, are quoted as reproduced in that same literature. The terms of the caravan duty come from Archinard's general order number 111 of 14 March 1893 as cited from the Malian archives, and the board at Médine from a battalion commander's letter of 4 April 1894, cited from the same source.

Two things were not established. I could find no verifiable French declaration from the Sudan of the 1890s addressed to the Muslim population as such — no proclamation of respect for Islamic law, no equivalent of the assurances given at Algiers in 1830 — and rather than assume one existed I have said that I could not find it. The developed policy of watching and managing Islam in French West Africa is a later phenomenon and belongs to a later module; nothing here should be read as dating it to the conquest. I have also not tested whether the crusade rhetoric was used inside the Chamber during the Sudan credit debates, which would be the sharpest available test of whether the story was doing work in the place where the money was voted, and the *Journal officiel* for those sessions should be searched before Module 7.

One caution about a temptation. The anti-slavery story is the easiest thing in this study to treat as pure fraud, and it was not. Slavery in this region was real, extensive and violent; the wars of the nineteenth century had been manufacturing captives at scale for decades; and men like Lavigerie were not lying about

what they had heard. That the story was also exactly the story a conquering power needed, and that the same administration taxed the trade at one head in ten while telling it, are separate facts. All of them are true at once, and the module is written to keep them so.

MODULE 4

# THE SCHOOL OF HOSTAGES

> *What was installed in the children of the Niger valley, by whom, at what age — and why France took such care not to install its own*

## The thing being fought over

Whoever gets a child before he can weigh anything decides what he will later think obvious. Not what he will believe about disputed questions — that is argument, and argument can be lost — but the prior layer: which authorities are worth listening to, what counts as decent, what a good life looks like, and which arrangements are simply how the world is rather than choices somebody made. An order that has installed all that in three or four generations of children no longer has to enforce itself very much. The neighbours do it, without instruction and without pay, and experience it as decency rather than obedience.

The Third Republic understood this precisely and was in the middle of doing it. The school laws of 1881 and 1882 made primary instruction free and then compulsory for both sexes from six to thirteen, and the syllabus set out in the 1882 law begins — before reading, before writing, before French itself — with *l'instruction morale et civique*, and goes on to the language and literature of France, the geography of France, the history of France down to the present day. The Church fought it because the Church knew exactly what was being taken. This was the Republic laying its hands on the French child, at the age when it matters, and paying for the privilege out of taxes.

The same government, in the same years, was ruling the Niger valley. What it did there with the same instrument is the

subject of this module, and the shortest way to state the finding is that it built four schools and gave one of them its honest name.

## The school of hostages

The institution was called the *école des otages*. School of hostages. That was not an insult coined afterwards by its critics; it was the working name in the French administration.

Faidherbe founded the first at Saint-Louis in 1855, for the sons of village chiefs and notables brought back from his campaigns. The purpose had two halves and neither was hidden. The boys were to be given French language and French values, and their presence in French hands discouraged their families from rebelling. It was restructured in 1861 and closed for lack of money on 1 January 1872.

The model went up the river with the conquest. On 1 December 1886 Gallieni opened a school of hostages and sons of chiefs at Kayes, and others followed at Bafoulabé and Kita; by 1888 there were four French schools in the Sudan, at Kayes, Bamako, Koundou and Bafoulabé, all of them at the richer posts. Gallieni described the Kayes establishment in the book he published in 1891. The children were housed in a sort of large *tata* that had formerly been the dwelling of the village chief, its interior divided into mud-brick rooms for the boys and their supervisors, the kitchen and the outbuildings; and the pupils, he noted, had made their own small furniture out of biscuit crates and scrap timber that had been left to them. In 1888 there were about fifty of them, aged between ten and seventeen, in blue Arab trousers, a yellow *boubou* and a red fez.

Recruitment was what the name implies. At Kita the boys who were supposed to appear at the start of term did not; order was restored a week later, one account has it, through the parents’ hypocritical cooperation — families not at all in favour, but

constrained to accept, partly by the advantages held out for their children in the matter of health. By the end of 1889 both recruitment and funding had become easier. Some of the officers charged with the children were not up to teaching them, and the French lessons went slowly; there was very little school material.

The school was later renamed to say what it was for: the school of sons of chiefs and of interpreters. That is the whole design in one title. France needed men who could translate, keep a register, carry an order to a village and be believed there. It needed perhaps a few hundred of them for a territory the size of France and Spain together. It recruited them from the families it had just defeated, held them, taught them French, and sent them back to administer their own people on its behalf.

## Why the door stayed shut

The obvious question is why France, having built the machinery at home and knowing exactly what it did, did not build it here. The answer was given plainly by the men in charge, and it turns on what a formation entitles you to.

A Frenchman formed in the Republic’s schools was a citizen with rights, and the rights were not decorative: he voted, he could not be punished administratively without a court, he could hold office. An African in the French Sudan was a subject, not a citizen. To put him through the same formation, in the same language, teaching him the same moral and civic instruction and the same history of the Revolution, would be to manufacture in large numbers a man with every qualification for a status the colony was not going to give him. Forming him is admitting him. Refusing to form him is the cheaper of the two.

The reasoning appears in the record in almost that form. Governor François-Joseph Clozel, opposing a proposal for a French-run Islamic school at Timbuktu, argued that the

supposed advances of Islam were so slight that they did not offset the regression produced by the imperceptible but certain detachment of many natives from their original faith, and that in those circumstances it would be *« souverainement impolitique »* — supremely impolitic — *« de donner, par l'instruction, une nouvelle vigueur à une religion qui a souvent témoigné une profonde antipathie pour notre civilisation »*, to give, through instruction, new vigour to a religion which has often shown a profound antipathy to our civilisation. He added that the colonial government had no duty in the Sudan, as it had in Algeria, to create openings in the Administration for a wholly Muslim population which alone bore the burden of public expenditure. The school already operating at Djenné, he observed, produced enough diplomas each year to meet the need.

Read the second sentence twice. The population pays for the state and is not to be given posts in it, and the reason given is that there is no duty to provide them. And the last remark supplies the scale: the requirement could be met by the annual output of one school.

The arithmetic bore that out for sixty years. At independence, something on the order of eight per cent of Malian children were in school.

## The formation that was already running

Nobody grows up unformed. A child who is not put through one framework is put through another, and in the Niger valley the other one had been running for centuries and did not need French money.

Qur'anic schooling was universal in the Muslim districts and old enough to predate every state France had defeated. It began early, it began with recitation and memorisation, and it was paid for by the families and the community. It carried with it a body of law, a calendar, a set of judgements about what a decent man

does, and an authority structure of teachers and clerics whose standing did not depend on anybody’s appointment. It had survived the Moroccan conquest, the Bambara kings, the jihad states and their wars. It survived France without difficulty, because France was not competing with it.

France did try, twice, to get inside it. The administration created French-run Arabic schools on a model borrowed from Algeria — a *médersa* at Djenné in 1906, one at Saint-Louis in 1908, one at Timbuktu in 1910 — whose purpose, in the terms of the scholarship, was to bring both the recruitment and the teaching of Islamic education under colonial control. It did not go well. Djenné was closed in August 1913. Timbuktu was opened precisely to attract Muslim parents by offering Arabic and some religious sciences, and failed in that specific aim because the parents were unwilling. What it did achieve was to survive as a model, which is a longer story and not this module’s.

What France did not do was displace the Qur’anic school. It watched it.

## The two thousand

There is one more institution and it matters more than its size suggests.

In November 1903 the governor-general of French West Africa signed an order organising education across the federation, and among other things created a teachers’ training school at Saint-Louis. It began as a section of the school of sons of chiefs and of interpreters — the direct descendant of the hostage schools. In 1907 the teaching section was separated from the interpreters; in March 1913 the school moved to the island of Gorée; after the death of the governor-general William Ponty at Dakar in June 1915 it took his name; in 1937 it moved again, to Sébikhotane near Rufisque. Entry was by competitive

examination and only the best pupils of each colony could sit it. In time it added sections for administrative and commercial agents and a preparatory cycle for the medical school at Dakar.

Over roughly half a century it produced something over two thousand graduates for the whole of French West Africa — for eight territories and some fifteen million people. From that pool of two thousand came a very large share of the schoolmasters, clerks, medical assistants and administrative agents of the federation, and, in the 1940s and 1950s, an extraordinary concentration of its political leadership: heads of state and heads of government across a dozen countries, from Ivory Coast to Niger to Togo, were Pontins. The school has been described by admirers as a nursery of the African elite and by critics as a school of submission and compromise, and both descriptions are pointing at the same fact — that France created, at very small scale and under very tight control, a body of men formed in its own frame, and then declined to give them the country their formation fitted them for.

## What that leaves standing

Set the pieces out and the shape of the colony’s future is visible in them, without anyone having to predict anything.

France installed its own formation in a few thousand people across half a century, chosen from the families of the defeated and trained to interpret, clerk and administer. It installed nothing at all in the rest, and stated as its reason that the rest were not going to be given the positions that such a formation implies. The formation that actually ran in the villages was one France had not built, did not control, could not defund and only ever watched.

The consequence is not moral, it is structural. An ordinary cultivator in the Ségou country, asked whose word he would take on what was right, would not have named a French official.

He would have named a man formed by an institution older than the colony. Later, and in far smaller numbers, there was a second such class: men formed by France, holding French qualifications, and told that these qualified them for nothing in particular.

A country in which the people the common man actually listens to were all formed by somebody other than the state is a country the state is renting rather than holding.

*A note on sources.* The name and function of the *écoles des otages*, their foundation by Faidherbe at Saint-Louis in 1855, the restructuring of 1861 and the closure on 1 January 1872 for lack of budget, Gallieni's foundation at Kayes on 1 December 1886, the existence of four schools in the Sudan by 1888 at Kayes, Bamako, Koundou and Bafoulabé, the episode at Kita and the later renaming as the school of sons of chiefs and of interpreters are drawn from the standard reference accounts of these institutions, which in turn rest on Denise Bouche's article *Les écoles françaises au Soudan à l'époque de la conquête, 1884-1900* (Cahiers d'Études Africaines, 1966). That article is the authority on this subject and is modern scholarship; it is paraphrased with credit here and has not been quoted. It should be read in full before this module is built upon, and the figure of four schools in 1888 in particular should be checked against it.

Gallieni's description of the Kayes school — the *tata*, the mud-brick rooms, the furniture made from biscuit crates and scrap wood, and the roughly fifty boys aged ten to seventeen in blue trousers, yellow *boubou* and red fez — is from *Deux campagnes au Soudan français* (Paris, Hachette, 1891), which is out of copyright; I have quoted the concrete details but not attempted a continuous verbatim passage, since the text available to me is a transcription within a secondary account rather than the printed page, and the wording should be verified against the original on Gallica before any sentence is presented inside quotation marks.

Clozel’s argument against the Timbuktu *médersa* is quoted in substance from the French, as reproduced in the published literature on educational reform in Mali, which cites it from an archival source through an intermediate study; the words *souverainement impolitique* and the clause about giving new vigour through instruction to a religion often hostile to French civilisation are reproduced as given there. I have not seen the original despatch and record that dependence. The foundation dates of the *médersas* — Djenné 1906, Saint-Louis 1908, Timbuktu 1910, and the closure of Djenné in August 1913 — are given consistently across several studies resting on Louis Brenner’s work on Islamic education in Mali.

The William Ponty school: the order of 24 November 1903 signed by governor-general Ernest Roume, the origin as a section of the school of sons of chiefs and interpreters, the separation of the teaching section in 1907, the move to Gorée in March 1913, the renaming after Ponty’s death at Dakar in June 1915, and the move to Sébikhotane in 1937 are established across the standard accounts. The total of graduates is given as somewhat over two thousand; that figure is repeated widely and I have not found its original source, so it is offered as an order of magnitude rather than a count. The characterisations of the school as a nursery of the elite and as a school of submission are the judgements of its admirers and its critics respectively, reported as such.

The school laws of 16 June 1881 and 28 March 1882 and the content of the 1882 syllabus are from the published texts. The figure of roughly eight per cent of children in school in Mali at independence comes from general reference literature rather than from a statistical series, and should be replaced with a properly sourced figure — ideally the AOF education statistics for the Soudan for a run of years — before it is used in an argument. The same applies to any claim about the number of Qur’anic schools or pupils, which I have deliberately not

attempted, since the colonial surveys of them were unreliable and their numbers are contested.

One thing was looked for and not found. I expected to find, and could not verify, a specific instrument by which the administration required Qur’anic teachers in the French Sudan to hold an authorisation — the licensing of the counter-formation rather than its suppression. Such regulation existed in French West Africa and led to the surveillance and arrest of clerics, but I could not establish its date or terms for this colony from sources I could check, and I have therefore said only that France watched the Qur’anic school rather than asserting that it licensed it. That instrument, if it exists, belongs in the module on information and suppression and should be run down there.

MODULE 5

# FIFTEEN DAYS AND A HUNDRED FRANCS

> *Why an ordinary cultivator paid — what could be done to him, by whom, how fast — and what happened in the one part of this society where the man with the whip stopped being able to use it*

## The ledger that matters

The interesting accounts are not the colony's. They are the ones kept in the head of a man with a hoe and a compound and four or five people depending on him, in a village three days' walk from the nearest French post, in the weeks before the rains.

He is being asked for money he has to raise by selling something he would rather eat, and for a number of days of his labour on a road he will not use, at the season when his own field needs him. There is no story in his head that makes this right; nobody has tried to put one there, and the men he actually respects were formed by an authority that predates the French entirely. So compliance is not conviction. It is arithmetic, and it has three entries.

What does it cost to pay? What does it cost not to pay? And is there anywhere else to be?

Everything about how this colony held together is in the answers, and the answers are not the same for everyone in it.

## The man who could reach him

Start with the second entry, because it is the one the administration worked hardest on.

The instrument was called the *indigénat*, and it rested on a distinction that ran through the whole French empire: the difference between a citizen and a subject. A citizen could only be punished by a court. A subject could be punished by an administrator. The regime was introduced for Senegal by a decree of 30 September 1887 and extended across French West Africa, and its content was simple enough to fit in a sentence. For a listed set of offences peculiar to natives, an administrator could impose up to fifteen days' imprisonment and a fine of up to a hundred francs, without any adversarial proceeding.

The list of offences is the tell. Alongside sanitary and building rules it contained failure to answer a written summons from the administrator; habitual negligence in the payment of taxes and in the performance of labour dues; and lack of respect toward a representative of French authority. There was a theoretical right of appeal to the governor. In practice the sentence had been served before an appeal could be heard.

Consider what that does to the arithmetic. The penalty is not severe — a fortnight, a fine — but it is *certain, immediate, and local*. It requires no evidence, no witnesses, no advocate, no hearing, no travel and no delay. It costs the state almost nothing to inflict, which means it can be inflicted often, which means everyone in the cercle has seen it inflicted on someone. It is administered by the man who also decides who is on the tax roll, who goes on the labour draft, and which chief keeps his post. Credibility, in the sense that matters to a cultivator weighing whether to pay, is not about the size of the punishment. It is about whether the punishment will actually arrive, and this one arrived.

There was a second tier for anything larger. A decree of 21 November 1904, refined by an order of 14 September 1907, allowed a governor to intern for as much as ten years any individual suspected of threatening the security of the colonial

state. That instrument is not for the man with the hoe. It is for the man other men listen to.

The regime was abolished on 22 December 1945.

## What was taken

Now the first entry: the size of the demand.

The head tax was the backbone of the colonial budget. It was assessed on the person, not on the property or the harvest — on every inhabitant, with exemptions for soldiers and their families, the aged, and children under about eight. It fell equally on a man with cattle and a man with nothing. It had to be found every year, in cash, whatever the rains had done.

Beside it stood the labour due, the *prestation*, which acquired the nickname *impôt de sueur*, the sweat tax. It was owed by men between eighteen and sixty, for a number of days that varied by colony and year, on public works — which in this territory meant roads and, above all, the railway. It was a corvée, and the French sources call it one.

Then there was the third demand, which took the man himself. A decree of 7 February 1912 established partial conscription in French West Africa: four years' obligatory service for men between twenty and twenty-eight, alongside voluntary enlistment, with the proportion of men to be taken capped at one per thousand, or two in case of need. The war moved the ceiling. Across the recruitments of 1912, 1915 and 1918 the federation supplied on the order of a hundred and fifty thousand men, something above three per thousand of an estimated population of eleven million; the figures vary between sources and this one should be treated as an order of magnitude. And the annual levy was in time divided into two parts — a first portion who became soldiers, and a *deuxième portion du contingent* who were conscripted not to fight but to

work on the federation's public works. Senghor's phrase for those men was *tirailleur-la-pelle*: rifleman-with-a-shovel.

How the demand was actually extracted, when a village was slow, is recorded by the administration itself. A report on affairs in the cercle of Nioro, written in 1937, describes what was done to hasten the collection: recalcitrant or late taxpayers made to carry heavy stones on their heads, whipped, made to jump through thorn hedges, left standing in the sun or made to stare into it for hours. In the village of Touroungoumbé, the report of another official the same year records, the inhabitants were simply told to put their children in pawn as security so that they could raise what the tax required.

Those are documents of 1937, not of the conquest. They describe a mature administration in a colony that had been quiet for a generation, in the ordinary course of collecting the annual revenue.

## Could he leave?

He could, and large numbers did, and the administration understood the problem exactly.

Flight was the standard response to the labour demand and to conscription — desertion from a work site by one man, or the crossing of a border by a whole village. The neighbouring British and Portuguese territories, the Gold Coast and the Gambia and Portuguese Guinea, became what the French called poles of attraction for labour, and the traffic was not only French subjects escaping but Africans going where the wages were. Later the Ivorian plantations did the same work.

Why the administration minded is worth stating in its own terms, because it makes the mechanism visible. Everything the state took rested on the census: the tax roll, the labour draft and the military levy were all derived from the count of who lived where. A man who moved was not merely absent; he had fallen

out of the transmission belt. Departures on any scale therefore hit the colony's budget directly, which is why the reports treat controlling them as a first-order administrative problem rather than a matter of sentiment.

So the exit was real, and it was expensive, and it was an exit from the register rather than from the world. It required leaving land, kin and the graves that made a place yours, and walking to a country where you would begin as a stranger. Most men did not take it. They paid.

## The part of the ledger that emptied

And then, in one section of this society, the arithmetic changed completely, and what followed is the largest single piece of evidence this collection has about what people do when the enforcer stops enforcing.

In the spring of 1905, at the moment when they should have been preparing for the rains, the slaves of Banamba — a Maraka town on the middle Niger that had been one of the great centres both of the slave trade and of the use of slave labour — began to leave their masters. Most were persuaded to stay one more year. On 15 May a Maraka noble killed one of them. In the spring of 1906 it began again, and this time it did not stop: an estimated three thousand left Banamba and the neighbouring Maraka towns between April and the end of May. For the next four or five years, all across the Sudan, groups of people walked out of the towns and estates and set off across the dry savanna to find where they had come from.

The scale is contested and the historians who have worked on it are careful. Martin Klein's estimate is that probably over a million people moved, and that this was somewhat more than a third of the enslaved population — which is to say that most slaves did not go. Hundreds of thousands reached home.

What the walk cost them is the part to hold onto. Nobody was helping. Where masters could coerce, they did. The walk from Banamba to Buguni was about two hundred and thirty kilometres, more than double that from Nioro, further still for people returning to the Gurunsi country from the desert edge — twenty to thirty days on foot for most of them. They owned nothing but what they could carry, and in most cases that was very little. They had no way of knowing what they would find; villages they were looking for had sometimes ceased to exist, and people taken young had forgotten the name of their clan. If they arrived and got land and seed, it was three months from planting to harvest, with nothing to eat in between.

And the point that decides the module: this was not a French policy. The two historians who established the story state it flatly — the transformation from slave labour to free labour in French West Africa resulted not from a decision by the administration but from the mass departure of the slaves themselves. What France had done was narrower. It had suppressed the trade, and it had reinforced the allied elites, most of whom were slave owners. The administration was, in Klein and Roberts's account, generally afraid to touch the tensions building inside these societies and confined itself to those two things.

## What actually changed

Set the two halves of the colony side by side in the same years and the mechanism is exposed without needing a theory.

For the free cultivator, the cost of defiance went *up* under French rule and stayed up. There was now a man in the cercle who could put him in a cell for a fortnight on his own signature, who had a written list of his household, who knew which chief to send, and whose decision could not be effectively appealed before it had been carried out. The demand was heavy and the enforcement was certain, and he paid.

For the enslaved, the cost of leaving *collapsed*, and it collapsed for a reason that has nothing to do with what anyone owned. A slave system does not run on walls. It runs on the master's ability to send armed men after a person who leaves, and to have the return of that person treated by everyone else as lawful. France had taken the monopoly of organised force in this valley for itself. It would not lend that force back for the retrieval of runaways, and it had made the trade illegal, so a recaptured person could not simply be sold on. The master's threat had not been softened. It had been made unenforceable, by a state that never intended that result and was in most respects propping the masters up.

The people who tested it had nothing. No land, no cash, no tools, no certainty of a destination, often no memory of one. On the older reasoning — that a man's freedom to leave is a fact about what he owns — these were the least free people in the colony and should have been the last to move. They were the first, and they moved in numbers that ended an entire labour system inside five years, while their free neighbours, who had fields and cattle and houses, stayed and paid the tax.

What the walk out of Banamba shows is that the cost column is not filled by property and not by borders. It is filled by whether somebody will come after you, and whether the people you reach will send you back.

*A note on sources.* The *indigénat* is described from the standard legal-historical literature: its introduction for Senegal by the decree of 30 September 1887 and extension to French West Africa; the penalty of fifteen days' imprisonment and a hundred francs' fine imposed administratively without adversarial proceeding; the categories of special infraction, including failure to answer a written summons, habitual negligence in paying taxes and performing labour dues, and lack of respect toward a representative of French authority; the illusory appeal; the decree of 21 November 1904 and the order

of 14 September 1907 permitting internment for up to ten years; and the abolition on 22 December 1945. The wording of the infraction categories quoted here is drawn from the published French texts as reproduced in that literature, principally Laurent Manière's study of the code in French West Africa and Sylvie Thénault's work on the penal regime; both are modern scholarship and are paraphrased with credit. The full text of the tables of special infractions as applied in the French Sudan specifically has not been consulted and should be, since these lists varied by colony and by year.

The head tax, its assessment per head with exemptions for soldiers and their families, the aged and children under about eight, and its character as the principal source of colonial revenue, are taken from Abdramane Traoré's study of the western Sudan, which cites the administrative sources by call number. So are the two 1937 documents: the report on affairs at Nioro describing stones carried on the head, whipping, thorn hedges and exposure to the sun, and the lieutenant-governor's letter of 5 March 1937 concerning the pawning of children at Touroungoumbé. I have not seen either original and record that dependence; both are dated 1937 and should not be read back onto the conquest period.

The *prestation* or *impôt de sueur*, owed by men between eighteen and sixty for a variable number of days on public works, and the later division of the annual military levy into a first portion of soldiers and a *deuxième portion* conscripted for public works, are established from Romain Tiquet's work on forced labour in Senegal and the associated literature; Senghor's phrase *tirailleur-la-pelle* is quoted as reported there. The decree of 7 February 1912 instituting partial conscription, with four years' service for men aged twenty to twenty-eight and a levy capped at one or two per thousand, is from the published account of West African recruitment; the total of roughly 156,700 men across the recruitments of 1912, 1915 and 1918,

representing about 3.4 per thousand of an estimated eleven million, is one figure among several in circulation and is given here as an order of magnitude, as the source itself does. Forced labour ended with the law of 11 April 1946.

The Banamba exodus rests entirely on Richard Roberts and Martin Klein, *The Banamba Slave Exodus of 1905 and the Decline of Slavery in the Western Sudan* (Journal of African History, 1980), and on Klein's *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa* (1998). Both are modern scholarship and are paraphrased, not quoted. The particulars taken from them are: the beginning of the departures in spring 1905 and their resumption in spring 1906; the killing of a departing slave by a Maraka noble on 15 May 1905; the estimate of about three thousand leaving Banamba and neighbouring Maraka towns between April and the end of May 1906; the continuation across the Sudan for four or five years; the estimate of probably over a million people moving, amounting to somewhat more than a third of the enslaved, with most not leaving; the distances, about 230 km from Banamba to Buguni and more than double from Nioro, and the typical walk of twenty to thirty days; the destitution of the walkers, the vanished villages, the forgotten clans and the three months from planting to harvest; and the judgement that the change came not from a French policy decision but from the departure itself, France having limited itself to stopping the trade while reinforcing allied elites who were themselves slave owners. Klein's own caution that the numbers can never be recovered precisely applies throughout and no figure here should be hardened.

One correction to the working assumptions this study began with. It was expected that a person's ability to leave would turn on what he owned, on the theory that property funds an exit and destitution forecloses one. The Banamba exodus refutes that in the sharpest possible way: the people who left owned nothing at all, walked for a month, and arrived at places that in many cases

no longer existed, while their propertied neighbours stayed. What decided the matter was not resources and not the position of a border, but whether anyone retained both the power and the licence to bring a departing person back. That is the finding this module contributes, and it should be tested against the other cases in the collection rather than assumed to generalise.

Two things were not established. I have no figure for the number of French administrators per head of population in the Soudan, which is the direct measure of how thinly the enforcer was spread and would sharpen everything in the second section; the *Annuaire* of French West Africa should give it. And I have no run of figures for the head tax rate in francs per person per year in this colony, which is the other half of the cultivator’s arithmetic and without which the burden cannot honestly be weighed. Both should be found before the module on extraction.

MODULE 6

# THE SECOND PORTION

> *What France took out of the Niger valley and by what instruments — the tax in cash, the labour in days, the men in years, and the great scheme that made tenants where a different crop elsewhere made owners*

## What there was to take

Begin with the disappointment, because it governs everything else.

The territory France had spent twenty years and a great deal of money conquering turned out to have almost nothing in it that Europe wanted. No gold worth the freight; the medieval reputation had long outlived the mines. No minerals that could bear a thousand kilometres of transport to a port. No plantation crop of its own like cocoa or coffee, because the rainfall would not support one across most of the country. No European settlement, because the climate killed Europeans and there was nothing to settle for. The rich market that a Paris review had promised its readers in 1881 did not exist, and by the 1920s nobody in the administration pretended otherwise.

What the colony did have was people and a river. Extraction here was therefore not the extraction of a commodity. It was the extraction of labour, in three forms — money that had to be earned, days that had to be worked, and years of a man’s life that could be taken outright — plus one enormous attempt to manufacture a commodity where none had existed.

## Cash, and what a cash tax actually does

The head tax was the base of the colonial revenue and it was assessed per person, on every inhabitant, exempting soldiers and their families, the aged and small children. It fell on the man with cattle and the man with none at the same rate. It came round every year regardless of the rains.

But the important feature is not the amount. It is that it was payable in francs.

A cultivator in the Ségou country growing millet for his own household has no francs and no way of getting any by farming as he has always farmed. To find them he must do one of three things: grow something a European firm will buy, sell part of the food his family was going to eat, or leave and work for wages somewhere a wage exists. That is the whole mechanism, and it does not require a single order to be given. Nobody has to command a man to grow cotton or to walk to the Senegalese groundnut fields or to hire himself out on a work site. The demand for francs, arriving annually and enforced by an administrator who can imprison him for a fortnight on his own signature, converts a subsistence household into a producer for the market and a supplier of labour, and does so at almost no administrative cost.

This is the quiet centre of colonial extraction everywhere and it is worth stating plainly because it is so easily missed: the tax is not merely revenue. It is the instrument that makes the rest of the economy possible.

I do not have the rates. This is the largest hole in the module and it needs filling: without a run of figures for the tax in francs per head per year in this colony, against a price series for millet or groundnuts, the burden cannot honestly be weighed against what a household actually produced. The figures exist in the colonial budgets and should be found.

## Days, and the line to the sea

The second form was labour taken directly, under the name of *prestation* — the sweat tax — owed by men between eighteen and sixty for a number of days each year on public works.

In this territory that meant, above all, the railway, and the railway's purpose was never disguised. The line was conceived to join the navigable reaches of the Niger to the port of Dakar so that the produce of the interior could be moved to the metropole. The first credit was voted by the French parliament in February 1881, before the conquest had properly begun. The Kayes-to-Koulikoro section, which links the Senegal river system to the Niger, was inaugurated in 1904 and was built essentially by the army. The Thiès-to-Kayes section, which closed the gap to the coast, was built between 1907 and 1924; the two networks were joined on 15 August 1923, and the through service from Dakar to Bamako opened on 1 January 1924.

The workforce is recorded. When construction resumed at the start of 1920, the colony of Upper Volta supplied four thousand men, which with volunteers and skilled workers brought the establishment to seven thousand; for those four thousand, the source states flatly, it was forced labour. By 1922 the works employed eight thousand men. Between October 1922 and August 1923, on the last hundred and sixty kilometres, the return shows eight officers, twenty-six non-commissioned officers, and seven thousand four hundred and fifty workers and labourers.

Eight officers and twenty-six sergeants to seven and a half thousand men. The ratio is the same one that took Ségou.

## Years

The third form is the one that gives this module its title, and it is the purest instance of the whole logic.

French West Africa conscripted. The annual levy was divided, and the division is the point: a *first portion* of the contingent became soldiers, and a *second portion* was called up and sent not to a regiment but to a construction site. These were young men taken by military levy, subject to military discipline, who spent their service digging. Léopold Senghor's name for them was *tirailleur-la-pelle* — rifleman-with-a-shovel.

The instrument was obtained deliberately, for a specific purpose, by a specific man. In June 1926 the hydraulic engineer Émile Bélime secured from the governor-general a decree authorising the military mobilisation of second-portion workers for terms of three years on his works. Three years of a man's life, taken under a conscription law, spent on somebody's irrigation scheme.

## The scheme

That scheme is the signature institution of colonial Mali and the largest single thing France ever attempted in the western Sudan.

Bélime had been studying the inland delta of the Niger since about 1919 and had a committee behind him in Paris from 1910. His report of 1929 was approved by the ministry of colonies in 1931, and a decree of 5 January 1932, signed by President Paul Doumer, created the *Office du Niger*: a public establishment with legal personality and financial autonomy, charged with studying, equipping and developing the valley. Bélime ran it for the next ten years.

The plan was for nine hundred and sixty thousand hectares over fifty years — five hundred and ten thousand of cotton and four hundred and fifty thousand of rice — irrigated by dams and canals off the Niger. Cotton was the object. France bought its cotton from America and Egypt and wanted a supply inside its own empire, and the delta was to provide it.

The land had people on it, and not enough of them for the plan, so people were brought. Settlers were recruited first from the surrounding country and then from further afield: Mossi and Samo from the region of Ouahigouya, later Minianka and Bambara from the Soudan itself. The administrative geography was rearranged to help — the Ouahigouya district was attached to the colony of the Soudan from 1 January 1933, in the general dismemberment of Upper Volta, a territory that had little the empire wanted except men. The historian of the project describes what its construction and operation required as the forced uprooting of tens of thousands of Africans.

It failed on its own terms, comprehensively and for decades. It never reached more than a small fraction of the hectarage planned. It swallowed a large share of an already thin colonial revenue and generated none, and it went on doing so after the Second World War. Under Bélime it acquired, in the same historian’s phrase, the de facto status of a state within the state.

## Owner or tenant

Here is the question that decides more about this country’s future than any other in the module, and the scheme answers it unambiguously.

A cultivator on the Office du Niger did not own his plot. He could not have owned it: the state owned the water, the dams, the canals, the levelled fields and the land under them, and a plot without water was worth nothing. What he had was a permission to work a holding, granted by the Office, on terms the Office set. The arrangement was eventually formalised, in 1954, as the *Contrat Annuel d’Exploitation* — the annual exploitation contract. Read the adjective. The right to farm the plot came up for renewal every twelve months, at the discretion of the body that had granted it.

Set that beside what a different crop does in a different colony. Where the crop is a tree — cocoa, coffee — a man clears bush that no register has ever entered, plants seedlings, waits four or five years, and thereafter owns something. The trees are his because he planted them; the land is his because nobody wrote down that it was anyone else’s; he can sell, bequeath, mortgage, or refuse to sell and hold out for a better price. He is a proprietor, and a proprietor can negotiate. Where the crop is irrigated cotton on an engineered scheme, the water is the state’s, the plot is the state’s, the contract is annual, and the price is set by the buyer. He is a tenant, and a tenant can be removed.

Two crops, two legal shapes, two entirely different kinds of man at the end of it. Nothing in this is about the character of the people concerned. It is about what the physical crop requires and therefore what the law can be built around.

There is a coda that belongs to a later part of this study but should be recorded here because it is the strongest evidence of what the instrument was. When the colonial power left, the independent state that inherited the scheme did not abolish the annual contract. It kept it, and it reduced the price paid to the grower for his paddy by a quarter. An instrument that lets whoever holds the water set the terms every twelve months is useful to any government, and was used by the next one.

## Sorted by caste

One more feature runs through all of it and has to be named because it was written into the law rather than left to practice.

Every mechanism described here fell on subjects and not on citizens. The head tax, the labour due and the conscription levy applied to people who were French subjects without French citizenship, which in this colony was very nearly everyone. The handful who held citizenship, and the Europeans, were outside

the whole apparatus. The chiefs France had installed sat in the middle: they drew up the tax rolls, produced the men for the labour drafts, and took their remuneration from the process, which is what made them worth installing. A man's exposure to extraction in the French Sudan was a function of his legal status, and his legal status was a function of a distinction the metropole had drawn.

## What the extraction teaches

France took very little out of this colony and took it from people who had very little. There was no export boom, no mineral rent, no settler agriculture. The revenue came from a tax on heads, the infrastructure came from a levy on days, and the one great productive venture consumed more than it ever returned.

But the tax on heads did something larger than raise money. Payable only in French currency, arriving every year, enforced by an official who needed neither evidence nor a court, it obliged a subsistence household to enter a market it had no other reason to enter — to grow for sale, or to sell what it had meant to eat, or to send a man away to earn. That is how a colony with nothing worth exporting nevertheless produced exports and a mobile labour force, and it required no coercion beyond the annual demand for francs.

And the one thing France did build at scale was built in a legal shape that produced dependants. The men brought onto the inland delta were moved there under compulsion, settled on land the state had engineered, given water the state controlled, and eventually given a contract that expired every year. Whatever else fifty years of that produces, it does not produce a class of proprietors with something of their own to bargain with.

*A note on sources.* The Office du Niger: the decree of 5 January 1932 creating it as a public establishment with legal personality and financial autonomy, signed under the presidency

of Paul Doumer, is a published text and its existence and date are certain; I have relied on the published summary and on the record in the French legislative database rather than on the full text, which should be read before this is built upon. The programme of 960,000 hectares over fifty years, comprising 510,000 of cotton and 450,000 of rice, Bélime's studies from about 1919, the Comité du Niger of 1910, the 1929 report and its approval by the ministry in 1931, and Bélime's direction until 1942 are drawn from the Malian and French scholarly literature on the project. The decree of June 1926 authorising the military mobilisation of second-portion workers for three-year terms on the works is cited in that literature to Tricart and Blanck; I have not seen the decree and its exact date within June 1926 should be confirmed. The recruitment of settlers from the Mossi and Samo country around Ouahigouya, and later of Minianka and Bambara, and the attachment of the Ouahigouya district to the Soudan from 1 January 1933, are from the ORSTOM studies of the Mossi settlers on the Office. The judgements that the project required the forced uprooting of tens of thousands, that it never achieved more than a small part of its intended scope, that it absorbed a large share of limited colonial revenue while generating none, and that it became a state within the state, are those of the McGill doctoral study of the Office under colonial rule and are paraphrased with credit.

The *Contrat Annuel d'Exploitation* is dated to 1954 and its retention after independence, together with the reduction of the paddy purchase price, are taken from a Malian scholarly article on food conditions on the Office; the size of that reduction is given there as a quarter. Both belong properly to the modules on change and on the grim accounting and are recorded here only because they establish what the instrument was.

The railway: the parliamentary credit of February 1881, the inauguration of the Kayes-Koulikoro section in 1904 and its construction essentially by the army, the building of the Thiès-

Kayes section between 1907 and 1924, the junction of the two networks on 15 August 1923 and the opening of the through Dakar-Bamako service on 1 January 1924 are from the standard accounts. The labour figures — four thousand men supplied by Upper Volta at the resumption of works in 1920, described in the source as forced labour, a total establishment of seven thousand, eight thousand employed in 1922, and eight officers, twenty-six non-commissioned officers and 7,450 workers on the final 160 kilometres between October 1922 and August 1923 — come from a specialist compilation on the line drawing on period administrative material. I have not traced them to the original returns and they should be checked; the mortality on these works, which every account alludes to and none I found quantifies, remains unestablished and is a serious gap.

The head tax and its exemptions, and the *prestation* owed by men between eighteen and sixty, are as described in the previous module and rest on the same sources. Senghor’s phrase *tirailleur-la-pelle* is quoted as reported in the literature on forced labour in French West Africa.

Three things remain open and are flagged rather than glossed. First, I still have no run of head tax rates in francs for this colony, which was identified as a gap before this module and has not been closed; without it the central claim about what the tax compelled cannot be quantified, only described. Second, I have not established the terms of the commercial regime — whether and when the administration fixed producer prices for cotton and groundnuts, through what body, and what the differential was between the price paid to the grower and the price obtained in France. The author’s question about buying and selling at set prices is therefore only partly answered here, and answering it properly will require the records of the marketing organisations and, for the later period, of the cotton development company. Third, I have deliberately not described the monetary arrangements of the franc zone, which I could not

verify to the standard this study requires, and which in any case belong to the later part of the story where they carry real weight.

MODULE 7

# THE SEVENTH OF DECEMBER

> *What France knew about the people it ruled, what France at home was told about what its officers did, and which of the two facts actually required suppressing*

## Two rooms

An ordinary order has to manage what one population believes. A colonial order has to manage two, and the two are separated by an ocean and by a month’s post.

In the colony the problem is the men to whom people listen, and it is a police problem. At home the problem is what the taxpayer and the deputy know about what is being done with their money and in their name, and it is a political problem. The two have almost nothing in common except that the same government faces both, and it is worth looking at each in turn, because in the western Sudan they were solved by completely different methods and only one of them looks like what people expect suppression to look like.

## What France did about the men people listened to

Start with the instrument, because the instrument is unambiguous and has already been named in this study in another connection: a decree of 21 November 1904, refined by an order of 14 September 1907, allowed a governor in French West Africa to intern for as much as ten years any individual suspected of threatening the security of the colonial state. No charge, no court, no fixed term of proof. It is not aimed at a

cultivator who is late with his tax. It is aimed at a man other men would follow.

But the striking thing about French practice in this territory is how little the internment power had to be used, and what was built instead.

The government of French West Africa maintained a Muslim affairs service, and its most productive officer was a soldier, administrator and interpreter named Paul Marty. Between about 1915 and 1930 Marty published, through the orientalist house of Ernest Leroux in Paris, a series of volumes covering the Islam of the whole federation: the Moorish tribes, Senegal, Guinea, four volumes on Islam and the tribes of the Sudan, then Ivory Coast, Dahomey and Niger. They are in every serious library and they are out of copyright.

Open one and you see what the surveillance of belief actually looked like. The books are not polemics against Islam and they are not written for the public. They are registers. A typical entry gives a cleric’s name, his approximate year of birth, his ethnic and regional origin, the brotherhood he belongs to, the teacher he studied under and where that teacher was trained, the chain of affiliation running back to a shaykh in Mecca or Fez, and where the man is now and what he is doing — down to noting that a particular Marka disciple of a particular Tijani teacher is the master of the Qur’anic school in a particular town.

That is a police file, laid out as scholarship, printed and bound. It records the whole interpretive class of a federation of eight territories: who they are, who taught them, whose authority they carry, and which of them is talking to whom.

The intention is legible in the form. France was not trying to abolish the Qur’anic school, and could not have. It was not trying to convert anybody; the missionary effort in this valley was negligible and the administration was largely hostile to it. It was not even, in the main, trying to shut clerics up. It was trying

to know exactly where every one of them was, whose word they carried, and which ones were connected to which others — so that the internment power, when it was used, could be used precisely, on the right man, once.

There is a detail in the same officer's bibliography that says more than any argument. In 1927 Marty published the Arabic chronicles of Oualata and Néma. The Arabic-writing class of the western Sudan had gone on producing chronicles under French rule, as it had under the Moroccans and the Bambara and the Tukulor; and the route by which that African documentary record reached print in Europe ran through the man whose job was watching them.

I have not established the press regime for this colony — what a printing press required, who could publish and under what authorisation — and that gap should be closed, though in a territory whose literate population numbered in the low thousands and whose literate language was Arabic, the newspaper was probably not the channel that mattered.

## What France at home was told

Now cross the sea, and the picture inverts.

In 1898 a mission was sent from the Sudan eastward toward Lake Chad under two officers, Captain Paul Voulet and Lieutenant Julien Chanoine, both veterans of the Sudanese campaigns. What the column did on its march is not disputed by anybody. It burned villages that had not resisted, killed people who had not fought, took women and children, and displayed severed heads. A senior officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Klobb, was sent after it with orders to relieve Voulet of his command. Voulet's men shot Klobb dead. The two officers were killed shortly afterwards by their own troops, and the column, under the junior officers who remained, went on and reached Chad.

Now the part that matters for this module. None of this was concealed.

The press in France was informed in August 1899, within weeks. On 8 October 1899 a deputy asked for a commission of inquiry. In 1900 he published a book about it. In November 1900 he went to the tribune of the Chamber of Deputies and interpellated the government of Waldeck-Rousseau to its face about the massacres. And on 7 December 1900 the Chamber of Deputies voted his request for a commission of inquiry down.

The deputy was Paul Vigné d'Octon, member for the Hérault, and he was not a bystander. He was a naval doctor who had served in the colonies, including in this one; he had been campaigning on colonial atrocities for a decade; and his book, *La gloire du sabre*, published in Paris in 1900, is a sustained account of the Voulet-Chanoine column with other episodes of the African conquest attached. He was, in other words, exactly the figure a system of concealment would have had to silence: an insider, with standing, a seat, a publisher and an audience.

He was not silenced. He was outvoted.

The surviving officers of the column were not tried. Lieutenant Joalland escaped a court martial, as did the mission's doctor and the non-commissioned officers. Joalland and his colleague Meynier subsequently became generals. The reason is not hard to locate and one modern account puts it as a question: could one punish men who had so enlarged the colonial cake? The column had reached Chad. Between the massacres becoming public in August 1899 and the vote in December 1900, the territory those officers had crossed had been added to France.

## The censorship that did exist

It would be wrong to say there was none, and the shape of what there was is instructive.

*La gloire du sabre* was banned by several municipalities. In Paris a censorship of a kind organised itself and the book was refused a place in the library. Its author faced legal proceedings, and an official observation mission he was to have undertaken overseas was stopped at the request of the ministry of colonies. Ten years later, when he tried to place a further pamphlet reopening one of the episodes, it was delayed and then refused.

Set that beside what was not done. He was not prosecuted for sedition. His seat was not taken from him. He spoke from the tribune of the Chamber and the speech went into the official record, where it remains. The book was printed by a Paris house, sold, and reviewed. What happened to him was harassment — municipal, administrative, petty, and entirely survivable.

The decisive act was not the library's refusal. It was the division on 7 December 1900.

## What actually did the work

Put the two halves of this module together and the mechanism is visible, and it is not the one the word *suppression* usually calls to mind.

In the colony, where France ruled people whose belief it had never captured, it built an apparatus of exact knowledge — names, teachers, affiliations, locations, printed in volumes — and held a power of internment in reserve to use sparingly and precisely. That is expensive, and the expense is itself the finding: an order that has to catalogue its clerics is an order that knows its story has not taken.

At home, where the story had taken, almost nothing was required. The facts got out on schedule, were printed in a book, were spoken aloud in the legislature by a man with the right to speak, and produced a vote and no consequence. Distance did part of it — a massacre a month's post away is an argument

rather than an event. Success did more: by the time the Chamber divided, the conquest those officers had committed the massacres in the course of had succeeded, and punishing them would have meant repudiating the gain. And beneath both, there was simply not very much appetite. A public that had been told for fifteen years that France was in Africa to end slavery had no framework in which to file a French column that raided for slaves, and largely did not file it.

Here is the refinement this case suggests, and it should be tested against the others rather than assumed. Hiding a fact is not the strong form of suppression; it is the weak one, because a hidden fact retains its charge and may detonate later. The strong form is to let the fact out, let it be printed and debated and formally examined, and let it produce nothing. A scandal that has been aired and survived a vote has been immunised. It can now be repeated in any future argument without effect, because the institution has already considered it and moved on, and everyone knows it.

There was no need to censor what could be outvoted.

*A note on sources.* The internment power — the decree of 21 November 1904 and the order of 14 September 1907 permitting a governor to intern for up to ten years an individual suspected of threatening the security of the colonial state — is as described in the previous module and rests on the same legal-historical literature.

Paul Marty (1882-1938), a French officer, colonial administrator and interpreter, published the series described here through Ernest Leroux in Paris: *Études sur l'Islam maure* (1916), *Études sur l'Islam au Sénégal* (1917), *L'Islam en Guinée* (1917), *Études sur l'Islam et les tribus du Soudan* in four volumes (1918-1921), *Études sur l'Islam et les tribus maures: les Brakna* (1920), *Études sur l'Islam en Côte d'Ivoire* (1922), *Études sur l'Islam au Dahomey* (1926) and *L'Islam et les tribus dans la colonie du Niger* (1930). All are out of copyright and the

Sudan volumes are on Gallica. The description of his method — entries giving a cleric's name, approximate birth year, origin, brotherhood, teacher, chain of affiliation and present location and occupation — is drawn from a page of the Ivory Coast volume rather than from the Sudan volumes, because that is the page I was able to read; the Sudan volumes should be examined directly before this characterisation is relied on, and a specimen entry from them quoted in full, since the exact form of the Sudanese entries is what the argument turns on. Marty's edition of the chronicles of Oualata and Néma appeared in 1927 in the *Revue des Études Islamiques*.

The Voulet-Chanoine affair: the mission's departure from the Sudan, the character of its march, the sending of Lieutenant-Colonel Klobb and his killing, the deaths of the two officers and the column's continuation to Chad under Joalland and Meynier are established across the French and African historical literature and are not in dispute in outline. The dates used here are: the press informed in August 1899; Vigné d'Octon's request for a commission of inquiry on 8 October 1899; his interpellation from the tribune in November 1900; and the Chamber's rejection of the commission on 7 December 1900. Two cautions. The date of the interpellation is given as 10 November 1900 in one account and 23 November 1900 in another, and it is possible that these are two separate interventions, one on the Sudan and one on Madagascar; I have therefore said November 1900 without a day. And one account states that the deputies rejected the proposal *par 409 voix*, which may mean 409 votes against or a majority of 409; I have not been able to resolve it and have therefore not used the figure. Both should be settled from the *Journal officiel* for the sitting of 7 December 1900, which would also supply the text of the debate — the sharpest thing this module could contain and the thing it most lacks.

*La gloire du sabre* was published at Paris in 1900; the imprint is given as Flammarion in some references and the widely

circulated modern edition is the Quintette reprint of 1984 with an introduction by Jean Suret-Canale. I have not quoted from it, for the reason given earlier in this study: the text in circulation is the reprint and I have not checked it against the original. The municipal bans, the refusal of the book by the library in Paris, the legal proceedings against the author, the halting of his observation mission at the request of the ministry of colonies, and the refusal in 1912 of a later pamphlet are taken from a scholarly account of the emergence of colonial scandal under the Third Republic; the underlying papers are in the Vigné d'Octon collection in the departmental archives of the Hérault. The judgement about whether men who had enlarged the colonial empire could be punished is a modern historian's formulation, reported as such. Historians have disagreed about how to classify Vigné d'Octon himself — whether a genuine anticolonialist or an occasional denouncer of atrocities — and that disagreement is noted rather than settled here.

Two things remain open. I have not established the press and printing regime in the French Sudan, which is a real gap even if the newspaper was probably not the channel that mattered in a territory whose literate language was Arabic. And I have not found the instrument, if one exists, requiring authorisation to keep a Qur'anic school in this colony; that question was carried forward from the module on formation and remains unanswered. On the evidence assembled here the more likely picture is that France catalogued these schools rather than licensing them, but that is an inference and should not be treated as a finding.

MODULE 8

# ELEVEN BEADS

> *Ask of every man above the cultivator whether he would be better or worse off if the arrangement ended tomorrow — and then find the one whose answer France could not control*

## The question that needs no conspiracy

An order does not hold together because the people running it agree with one another. Very often they detest one another. It holds together because each of them, attending only to his own position and asking only what serves it, arrives independently at the conclusion that the arrangement should continue — and the sum of all those private answers is a defence of the whole, mounted by men who never met to arrange it and would deny that they had.

The test is a single question put to every person above the cultivator: *if this ended tomorrow, would you be better off or worse?* Where the answer runs *worse* all the way up, the order reproduces itself indefinitely and nobody has to conspire. Where somebody in the chain would be better off, or merely unaffected, there is a link that will not hold, and the interesting history begins there.

This is a tendency and not a law. Some orders arrange it well and some badly, and what follows is an attempt to walk the ladder of the French Sudan and find the rung that does not bear.

## Walking up

At the bottom, the cultivator. He is not part of the arrangement; he is what the arrangement is for. Held by an administrator who can imprison him for a fortnight without a hearing, taxed in a

currency he must go and earn, drafted for the roads. If it ended tomorrow he would be better off, which is precisely why the whole apparatus above him is designed so that his opinion does not signify.

Above him, the village chief and above that the canton chief. Here the design is unusually clean, because the canton was not a thing that existed before the French made it. It is an administrative unit drawn to suit administration, and its chief is an *auxiliary of the administration* in the formal sense. He is appointed. He draws an allowance charged to the colony's budget, within the credits voted annually for exactly that purpose. He is subject to a graded scale of discipline: reprimand, temporary suspension of the allowance, temporary withdrawal of employment, reduction of the allowance, revocation. His duties are the ones that matter to the state — he assists in drawing up the census lists on which recruitment is based, presents the young men of those lists to the commissions, supervises the payment of the tax, keeps order in his canton, and reports anything liable to disturb it.

Ask him the question. If the French left tomorrow he would lose the allowance, the office, and the armed backing that is the only reason the office is obeyed. He would be left facing the people he has spent his career taxing and conscripting, with no independent claim on them — because the canton he heads is a French invention and everybody knows it, and because the role he has been made to perform has cost him credit with his own people rather than earning it. His alignment with the arrangement is not a bonus he enjoys. It is the only asset he has left, and it evaporates with the arrangement.

The colony had established the terms at the very beginning and had not needed to restate them. The Bambara prince restored to the throne of Ségou in April 1890 objected to the boundaries of what he had been given and was dead, with

twenty-three of his counsellors, seven weeks later. Every man appointed after that understood what he was holding.

France also arranged for the office to reproduce itself under supervision. The sons and nephews of chiefs marked out for command were required to attend the regional school at the cercle headquarters — the direct descendant of the hostage schools — so that the next generation of intermediaries would arrive already formed, already French-speaking, and already known.

Above the chief, the interpreter and the clerk. Their entire value is a qualification that only one employer in the world recognises. Ask them the question and the answer is stark: outside the French administration, a certificate in French clerking is worth nothing at all in the Niger valley.

Beside them, the soldier and the veteran. A man who served in the riflemen had a pension claim, a status in his village, and in many cases a legal position better than his neighbours'. His claim was on France, payable by France, and worth exactly as much as France's continuance.

On the great irrigation scheme, the settler, holding a plot whose water belonged to the state and, eventually, a contract renewed annually at the state's discretion. He is the purest case on the ladder: a man with nothing whatever that is his own.

And at the top, the commercial houses, the officials, the officers, whose answer requires no argument.

The chain therefore runs *worse* almost the whole way up. This is why the French Sudan, having been conquered by a few hundred men, could then be administered by a few hundred men. Nobody in the structure had to be persuaded of anything. Each of them was defending a position that only existed while France did, and the aggregate of that self-defence was the order, held together by men who in many cases disliked each other intensely and had no need to agree.

*Almost* the whole way up.

## The man with eleven beads

In the town of Nioro du Sahel, in the far west of the colony, there lived a sharif named Ahmedou Hamahoullah, born about 1881, whom his followers called Cheikh Hamallah. He was the head of a branch of the Tijaniyya brotherhood, and what distinguished his branch from the established one was the number of times a particular prayer was recited. His people said eleven. The others said twelve. In the files of the French administration the two are simply *les onze grains* and *les douze grains* — the eleven beads and the twelve.

That is the entire doctrinal content of the matter, and it is worth pausing on, because an empire that had conquered a territory the size of France and Spain, that ran it with a few hundred officials, and that had not troubled to convert anybody to anything, spent nineteen years and a great deal of effort on the difference between eleven and twelve.

It did so because of what Hamallah held. He had not been appointed by anyone. He drew no allowance. He held no office in any structure France had built, and there was nothing in the gift of the government of French West Africa that he required. What he had was the conviction of a very large number of people that he was who he said he was — and learning, and descent, and a reputation for refusing things. None of it had been granted by France. None of it could be revoked by France. Asked the question this module puts to everyone else on the ladder, he was the one man in the colony for whom the honest answer was that the end of the arrangement would cost him nothing at all.

France therefore could not co-opt him. There was no post to offer, no allowance to attach, no revocation to threaten. The only

instrument left was force, which is the expensive instrument the whole edifice existed in order not to use.

It used it, repeatedly, for eighteen years.

In 1925 he was interned for ten years, by general orders of 28 November and 17 December. The telegram announcing it is in the record and reads like a consignment note: *« Je dirige ce jour sur Dakar Chérif Hamallah chef de la secte tidjani maghrébine "onze grains" interné pour dix années »* — I am sending to Dakar today the Sharif Hamallah, head of the Maghrebi Tijani sect of the eleven beads, interned for ten years. The grounds were a report accusing him of imposing his candidate on a Moorish tribe and of failing to prevent brawls between his disciples and the twelve-bead Tijanis of Nioro. The Director of Political Affairs at the government-general at the time thought the alleged facts did not justify so grave a sanction. The sanction was imposed anyway.

He was sent first to Méderdra in Mauritania, and afterwards to Adzopé in Côte d'Ivoire. And here the mechanism reveals itself. Followers from Chinguetti found where he was; the news that he was at Méderdra spread through Mauritania and the Soudan; the faithful came from everywhere bringing gifts; three confidants from Nioro joined him. He declined to have his family brought to him. His arrival was reported to the administration by the local administrator, in the correct form, as a courtesy visit paid on the day of his descent.

Removing him from Nioro had not reduced him. It had made him a pilgrimage.

The pattern held for the rest of his life. In June 1940 his house at Nioro was surrounded at dawn on the nineteenth and the aircraft carrying him took off at six o'clock. On the same day almost all of the Hamallist leadership of Nioro was arrested and tortured, and then deported to camps at Ansongo, at Bourem and at Kidal. By the beginning of April 1942 he was in France,

interned at Évaux-les-Bains in the Creuse, in a camp for administrative internees, where his fellow detainees included Édouard Herriot, three times president of the Council of the Third Republic. On 28 August 1942 the doctor attached to the camp asked for him to be transferred to Corsica, on the ground that he could not survive the climate. The request was refused. By October he was gravely ill. He died on 16 January 1943, in a hospital at Montluçon in the occupied zone; the cause given by the French authorities was a cardiopathy. He was buried in the eastern cemetery of that town.

And then the administration did the thing that says most about what it thought it was dealing with. It concealed the death. For two and a half years the government of French West Africa did not announce that the sharif of Nioro was dead, because it was afraid of what his followers would do when they found out. It was announced at Nioro on 7 June 1945.

The verdicts recorded in the political reports are worth setting down because they are the administration's own summary of the problem. Governor-General Pierre Boisson: *« Chérif Hamallah est un agitateur soudanais »* — the Sharif Hamallah is a Sudanese agitator. A commandant: *« Chérif Hamallah est un marabout dangereux »* — a dangerous marabout. From 1924 to 1943 every governor-general of French West Africa and their lieutenant-governors took the same line.

Note what is not in those verdicts. No accusation of rebellion, no armed following, no plot, no seized weapons. What made him dangerous was that people believed him, and that France had no way of making them stop.

## What the break shows

Set the two halves together and the mechanism of a stable colonial order becomes visible in outline, along with its one structural gap.

Everything France distributed to the men above the cultivator was something France had first created and could therefore withdraw: an office in an invented canton, an allowance on a budget line, a certificate honoured by one employer, a pension, a plot with an annual contract. That is not incidental. It is the whole design, and it is why the design worked with so few Europeans. A man whose position exists only inside an arrangement will defend that arrangement instinctively, in his own interest, without instruction and without affection for anyone else defending it. He does not have to like the commandant. He does not have to like the other chiefs. He has only to notice, correctly, that he is finished the day it ends.

The one thing France could not manufacture and therefore could not repossess was the standing of a man whose authority rested on other people’s conviction. It had built no institution capable of producing such standing, because it had deliberately declined to form the population at all — and a formation it did not run was a formation it could not license, discipline or defund. So the interpretive class of this country remained, for the whole colonial period, outside the chain of interests that held everything else in place.

France’s response was the one available to it, and it is diagnostic. It catalogued them exhaustively, in printed volumes, name by name and teacher by teacher. And when cataloguing was not enough it fell back on internment — a decree, a ten-year order, an aircraft at dawn, a camp in the Creuse — which is force applied to a belief, and which did not work, and which the administration knew had not worked, because it hid the man’s death for two and a half years.

There was a second gap forming quietly at the same time, in the small class of men France had formed in its own schools: their qualification was French, their employer was French, and by the ordinary arithmetic they belonged firmly in the chain. But what had been installed in them along with the French language

was a vocabulary of rights that the colony had no intention of honouring, and a man may hold a position by interest and a claim by conviction at the same time. That is a matter for the modules that follow.

*A note on sources.* The structure and status of the canton chieftaincy — its character as a colonial administrative creation, the chief as an auxiliary of the administration, the allowance charged to the colony's budget within annually voted credits, the graded scale of discipline from reprimand through suspension and reduction of the allowance to revocation, and the duties in respect of census lists for recruitment, tax collection and public order — are described here from the published regulatory summaries for French colonial territories, principally an inventory of territorial administration in the former French Equatorial Africa, together with the scholarly literature on chieftaincy and tax collection in French Africa. That is a real weakness and it is flagged rather than hidden: these regulations varied between colonies, and the specific texts governing the *chefs de canton* of the French Sudan have not been consulted. They exist and should be found before the detail is relied on. What is not in doubt, and rests on the Sudanese evidence used earlier in this study, is that the office was created by the conquering power, that its holders were appointed and removable, and that the first man installed at Ségou was killed seven weeks after his enthronement.

The requirement that sons and nephews of chiefs destined for command attend the regional school at the cercle headquarters is quoted in substance from colonial instructions reproduced in a university documentary collection on education and citizenship in the colonies, drawn from the Archives nationales d'outre-mer.

The Hamallah material rests principally on Alioune Traoré's study, *Islam et colonisation en Afrique: Cheikh Hamahoullah, homme de foi et résistant*, as reproduced online, and on the

reference literature that follows it. The particulars used are: his birth about 1881 and his position as sharif of Nioro; the distinction between the eleven-bead and twelve-bead Tijaniyya; the internment for ten years under general orders of 28 November and 17 December 1925, with the telegram quoted exactly as given there; the Descemet report's allegations and the view of the Director of Political Affairs that they did not justify so grave a sanction; the internments at Méderdra and at Adzopé in Côte d'Ivoire; the arrival of followers from Chinguetti and the spread of the news through Mauritania and the Soudan; the surrounding of his house at Nioro at dawn on 19 June and the departure of the aircraft at six, with the arrest, torture and deportation of the Hamallist leadership to Ansongo, Bourem and Kidal; the internment at Évaux-les-Bains from early April 1942 alongside Édouard Herriot; the camp doctor's request of 28 August 1942 for a transfer to Corsica and its refusal; the death at Montluçon on 16 January 1943 with cardiopathy given as the cause by the French authorities; the burial in the eastern cemetery; the concealment of the death until its announcement at Nioro on 7 June 1945; and the phrases recorded in the political reports, *un agitateur soudanais* attributed to Governor-General Pierre Boisson and *un marabout dangereux* to a commandant, together with the statement that every governor-general and lieutenant-governor from 1924 to 1943 held the same line.

Several cautions. Traoré writes as a sympathetic scholar of the sharif and his study should be read as such, though the documents he quotes are French administrative ones and the quotations are what is used here. The year of the dawn arrest at Nioro is given as 1940 in the surrounding accounts and I have used it, but the day and month come from a source that does not restate the year at that point, and the sequence between June 1940 and April 1942 — whether there was an intermediate deportation to Algeria, as some accounts suggest — has not been established and is left out rather than guessed. The date

on the tomb at Montluçon is reported as 19 January 1943 against the administrative date of the 16th, and accounts differ as to whether the burial was in an individual grave or in the common ground for the indigent; both discrepancies are recorded here without resolution. The number of Hamallah's followers, which is the quantity that would actually measure the finding, I have not found in any form I would trust, and no figure is given.

One thing this module could not do and should. The question it puts — better or worse off tomorrow — is answerable with numbers for at least two of the rungs: the allowance paid to a canton chief, and the pension paid to a discharged rifleman, both against the annual head tax and against a labourer's wage. Those figures would convert an argument into an arithmetic, and they are in the colonial budgets. They were flagged as missing before the module on extraction and are still missing here.

MODULE 9

# THE SAME RIGHTS AND THE SAME WAGES

> *Whether there were real counterweights — who held the guns, the money and the last word in a cercle, where the liberties came from when they finally came, and which class in this colony had anything to hold them with*

## What a liberty is made of

A liberty is not a sentence in a constitution. It is a fact about how many hands are holding things.

Where the same coalition commands the armed men, controls the wealth and its sources, and decides what is authoritatively true, there is no liberty whatever the documents say, because there is nobody a wronged man can appeal to who is not also the man who wronged him. Where those things are split — where the treasury does not own the court, where somebody with money is not dependent on the man with the soldiers, where a rival account of events can be published and heard — liberties tend to appear, and they appear as a by-product rather than as a gift. Factions that fear each other build protections against each other; those protections are drafted in general language because general language is what a faction can persuade the others to accept; and the general language then turns out to protect people the drafters never had in mind. Due process, freedom of speech, the rule that a man must be told the charge — these are, very largely, the residue of quarrels among the powerful, left lying about afterwards and picked up by whoever can reach them.

That is the test to apply here, and the French Sudan gives an unusually clean result in both directions.

## One hand

For the first fifty years there was no split of any kind.

Consider what the commandant of a cercle actually held. He had armed men: the *gardes-cercles* under his own orders, and beyond them a garrison of riflemen he could call on. He had the wealth: the tax roll for his cercle was drawn up under his supervision, the labour draft was raised on his authority, and after 1904 the land itself belonged to the state by definition unless somebody could produce a title, which almost nobody could. He had the personnel: the canton chiefs were appointed and could be reprimanded, suspended, docked, or dismissed at his recommendation. And he had the last word, because under the *indigénat* he could imprison a subject for a fortnight and fine him a hundred francs on his own signature, with an appeal that would be heard after the sentence had been served.

Now list what was absent. No court a subject could take him to. No newspaper. No right of association. No elected assembly of any kind in the territory. No African proprietor of any scale whose wealth was independent of the administration, because the one great agricultural enterprise was a state scheme whose settlers held annual permits. No commercial class of consequence outside the French houses. No church with an independent base, the missionary effort here having come to almost nothing. Not even a rival administrative authority, since the officers of this colony had spent the conquest ignoring the governor of Senegal and answering to Paris when it suited them.

One man, four monopolies, and beneath it a rhetoric — the rights of man, the mission of a republic founded on 1789 — pitched at a volume unmatched by any other colonial power. This is the cleanest available demonstration that the volume of the rhetoric is uncorrelated with the fact.

The federation did contain one genuine exception, and its location is the proof of the rule. In the four communes of

Senegal — Saint-Louis, Gorée, Rufisque and Dakar — the inhabitants held a legal status that carried real political rights, elected a deputy to Paris, and had newspapers, lawyers and municipal politics. That was a coastal enclave three generations old, and the French Sudan had nothing resembling it.

## When it broke, and what broke it

The foreclosure ended, and it ended for reasons that had nothing to do with anybody in the Niger valley.

France was defeated in 1940 and split into two Frances, each claiming to be the real one, and both of them suddenly needed Africa — for troops, for territory, for the standing that comes from governing something. The Free French based their claim in Africa and held a conference at Brazzaville in 1944 about the empire's future. When France came to rebuild its constitution in 1945 and 1946, the assemblies that did the rebuilding contained overseas deputies, and the parties of the left needed their votes.

Out of that quarrel, and in a little over a year, came the following.

An ordinance of 22 August 1945 provided that elections overseas would be held in a double college: one college of French citizens and the originaires of the four Senegalese communes, the other of everyone else. The law of 11 April 1946, proposed by an Ivorian deputy, abolished forced labour. The law of 7 May 1946, adopted by the Constituent Assembly on 25 April and in force from 1 June, proposed by the Senegalese deputy Lamine Guèye, provided that all inhabitants of the overseas territories held the quality of citizen on the same footing as French nationals of the metropole — and with it the *indigénat*, the whole apparatus of administrative punishment described earlier in this study, came to an end. A law of 9 May 1946 established a deliberative assembly in each overseas territory.

Then the qualifications began, and they are as instructive as the grants.

The Constitution of 27 October 1946 restated the citizenship principle in its article 80 and then, in article 82, provided that citizens would be governed by different systems of private law according to their origin: one could be a French citizen of French personal status, of Muslim personal status, or of customary personal status, with different family law attaching to each. Everyone a citizen; not everyone under the same law. And the electoral law of 5 October 1946 recognised as electors only citizens of French civil status together with citizens of local status falling within certain listed categories — which is to say that being made a citizen in May did not make one a voter in October.

It took another ten years to close that gap. The framework law of 23 June 1956 finally instituted universal suffrage and the single electoral college, and gave the territorial assemblies executive councils with real business to transact.

So the sequence, from the point of view of a man in the Ségou country, ran: in 1946 he ceased to be liable to fifteen days on an administrator’s signature, ceased to be liable to the labour draft, and became a citizen governed by customary law who could not vote; and in 1956 he became a voter.

None of it was conceded to pressure from the Niger valley. All of it was residue.

That does not make it worthless — this is the point most easily got wrong. A right conceded for somebody else’s reasons is still a right, and the ending of the *indigénat* was, for the man it had applied to, the largest single change in sixty years. But it does determine what happens next, because a liberty that arrives as a grant has to be held by somebody, and whether it can be held depends entirely on what the people at the receiving end have to hold it with.

## Who had a base

Here the Sudan turns out to be a particular kind of colony, and its particularity explains a great deal.

There was no African propertied class of any weight. No planters, because the rainfall would not carry a tree crop. No landowners, because the state owned the land unless a register said otherwise. No substantial commercial bourgeoisie. The men on the great irrigation scheme held annual contracts.

What the Soudan had instead was a payroll: schoolteachers, clerks, medical assistants, interpreters, veterans with pensions, and above all railwaymen. These were the men France had formed, in the small numbers described earlier — a few thousand out of millions — and every one of them drew his income, his status and his qualification from the colonial state or from an enterprise the state ran.

They organised as such. The first African teachers' union in the federation was founded at Dakar in 1936 by Mamadou Konaté, by Ouezzin Coulibaly, and by a young Sudanese schoolmaster whose name belongs to a later part of this study. When the political parties of French West Africa came together, the founding congress was held at Bamako, in the Soudan, in October 1946 — the territory with the least commerce and the fewest proprietors in the federation being the place where the federation's politics were organised.

And then, at midnight on 10 October 1947, the African railwaymen of the Dakar-Niger and the other lines of French West Africa stopped work.

The strike lasted a hundred and sixty days, five months and ten days, until 19 March 1948. Of roughly twenty thousand railwaymen, something between fifteen and seventeen thousand came out. It halted the export of raw materials across the whole federation; on the Dakar-Bamako line the administration could run trains twice a week, one for the mail and one to feed Dakar.

The strikers had no pay for five months. Their wives, and women from the surrounding countryside, walked hundreds of kilometres carrying millet and sorghum into the towns to keep the strikers' families alive. After a hundred and sixty days, sixty-two per cent were still out.

The demand, stated plainly by the men who made it, was the same rights and the same wages as European workers.

That sentence is the whole of this module. It is not a demand for independence and it is not a demand for land. It is a claim of equality made inside the French system, in French terms, by men whose entire position was inside that system — and it was made possible by a right to organise which France had granted eighteen months earlier for reasons of its own, in Paris, in the course of settling a quarrel with itself.

The outcome was mixed in the way such things are. The railway administration recruited some two and a half thousand replacements and got about nine hundred strikers back, who formed a rival union. The strike ended with a wage increase in the region of twenty per cent, with the union's secretary-general, Ibrahima Sarr, imprisoned and with strikers dismissed. For the first time in the region's history, African wage earners had beaten a French administration in a straight contest, and had done so by stopping the thing the colony existed to do.

One further detail belongs here because it disposes of a comfortable assumption. The religious leaders — the marabouts, the men who in the previous part of this study were the one authority France could neither buy nor break — took a position against the strike.

## What the two counter-elites were

Set them side by side. The colony had produced two groups outside the chain of interests that held everything else together, and they were not allies and did not share a project.

The first held learning and other men's conviction, owed nothing to France, could not be dismissed or defunded, and wanted the colonial state to leave its schools and its brotherhoods alone. The second held a wage packet, a certificate and a union card, owed everything to France, could be dismissed and frequently was, and wanted the colonial state to pay it the same as it paid Europeans. Their interests did not converge; on the biggest industrial confrontation of the period they were on opposite sides.

This is plurality of a real kind — more than one authority the common man might listen to — and it is not the same thing as a coalition. What it produced was not a united front against France but two independent pressures on France, which the administration could and did play against each other.

And the second of them had one characteristic that decides much of what follows. A class whose base is property asks to be let in: it wants the state to recognise what it already has. A class whose base is a payroll and an office has nothing to be recognised — its position *is* the state's position — and so what it asks for is not admission but control of the thing that sets the wage and grants the office.

There is only one of those, and it is the state.

## What the liberty variable shows here

For fifty years there was nothing to test. One official in each cercle held the armed men, the tax roll, the labour draft, the appointment of chiefs and the power to punish without a court, in a territory with no press, no courts open to subjects, no assembly, no association, and no independent wealth. Whatever was being said in Paris about the rights of man, there was no counterweight of any description, and there were therefore no liberties — only the personal decency or indecency of individual administrators, which is not a liberty but a lottery.

When liberties arrived they arrived all at once, in about fourteen months, out of a constitutional crisis in the metropole in which nobody in this colony had a part. They were then immediately qualified in ways that show what the grantors intended: citizenship without a common civil law, citizenship without the vote, and a further decade before the vote arrived. That is what a residue looks like — real, usable, and shaped by the quarrel it fell out of rather than by the needs of the people who picked it up.

And what determined whether it could be picked up was the shape of the class on the receiving end. In this colony that class was made of wages and offices rather than land, because the country had no land worth owning under a law that would have recognised the owning. Within eighteen months of the right to organise arriving, fifteen thousand of them shut the federation’s railways for a hundred and sixty days and won.

They had discovered what they held. It was not property. It was the ability to stop the state working.

*A note on sources.* The powers concentrated in the commandant de cercle are assembled from the material used earlier in this study — the *indigénat* under the decree of 30 September 1887, the domanial decree of 23 October 1904, the canton chieftaincy and its disciplinary scale, and the tax and labour instruments — rather than from a single text describing the office. A published description of the office and its attributions in the French Sudan specifically would strengthen this and should be found; the *Annuaire* of French West Africa and the standard administrative manuals are the places to look. The characterisation of the four communes of Senegal as the federation’s one exception rests on the standard literature and is not developed here because it belongs to another colony’s study.

The legislative sequence is taken from published French texts and the standard reference accounts: the ordinance of 22

August 1945 establishing the double college; the law of 11 April 1946 abolishing forced labour, associated with the Ivorian deputy Houphouët-Boigny; law no. 46-940 of 7 May 1946, the loi Lamine Guèye, adopted by the Constituent Assembly on 25 April 1946, promulgated on 7 May, published on 8 May and in force from 1 June, conferring the quality of citizen on all inhabitants of the overseas territories and ending the *indigénat*; law no. 46-972 of 9 May 1946 instituting a deliberative assembly in each overseas territory; articles 80 and 82 of the Constitution of 27 October 1946, the second providing for differing systems of private law according to origin; law no. 46-2151 of 5 October 1946 restricting the electorate to citizens of French civil status and to citizens of local status within listed categories; and the framework law of 23 June 1956 instituting universal suffrage and the single college. The judgement that the 1946 citizenship amounted to an imperial citizenship distinct from metropolitan citizenship is that of Senegalese historians quoted in the recent commemorative literature and is reported as theirs.

The railway strike: the dates of 10 October 1947 to 19 March 1948, the duration of a hundred and sixty days or five months and ten days, the participation of something between fifteen and seventeen thousand of about twenty thousand railwaymen across the Dakar-Niger, Abidjan-Niger, Benin-Niger and Conakry-Niger lines, the effective blocking of raw material export, the reduced service of two trains a week on the Dakar-Bamako line, the women carrying millet and sorghum into the towns, the figure of sixty-two per cent still out at the end, the recruitment of about 2,500 replacements and the return of some 900 strikers into a rival union, the settlement involving a wage increase in the region of twenty per cent, and the imprisonment of Ibrahima Sarr are drawn from the French and Senegalese accounts of the strike and from an academic study of the Dakar-Niger railroad. The figures vary between accounts and are given here as ranges or approximations; a strike of this importance deserves a properly sourced set of numbers and the archives of

the Régie and of the Fédération des Syndicats de Cheminots Africains would supply them. The formulation of the demand as the same rights and the same wages as European workers is as reported in those accounts. The opposition of the marabouts to the strike is reported in the French reference account of the general strikes of this period; it is a single-source claim in what I could read and should be corroborated, because it carries real weight in the argument here.

The foundation of the first African teachers' union at Dakar in 1936 by Mamadou Konaté, Ouezzin Coulibaly and a third founder, and the holding of the founding congress of the interterritorial party at Bamako in October 1946, are from the Malian political literature. The third founder is deliberately not named here; he belongs to the last part of this study, and naming him now would let the outcome colour the analysis of the arrangement that produced him.

Two things are missing that this module needed. There is no figure here for the size of the electorate in the French Sudan at any of the elections between 1945 and 1958 — the number of registered voters against the population — which is the direct measure of how much of the grant was actually distributed, and it exists in the electoral returns. And I have not established what proportion of the colony's African wage earners were employed by the state or by state enterprises, which is the quantity that would turn this module's central claim about the base of the political class from a description into a measurement.

MODULE 10

# PUT ON A TRAIN AT DAKAR

> *Where the crack actually opened — four thousand kilometres away, in a war this colony had no part in — and why a territory that voted yes almost unanimously in 1958 was a separate republic two years later*

## Where to look

Cultivators do not overthrow a working state apparatus, and this one worked. A penal regime that reached the individual through an appointed chief; a census that fixed what he owed in money, in days and in sons; a labour scheme whose settlers held annual permits; a clerical class exhaustively catalogued and, when necessary, removed by aircraft at dawn. It was tested and it held.

So the question is never what the governed did. It is which crack opened inside the hierarchy — fracture, exhaustion, conquest by a rival, or more claimants than there are chairs. And in a colony the hierarchy to examine is not the one in the colony. It is the metropolitan one, because that is where the warrant is issued and where the cost of holding is priced.

France in 1958 had not lost the capacity to hold the French Sudan. There was no insurgency, no maquis, no armed movement of any kind. The territory was quiet, poor, administered by a few hundred Europeans, and its politics were conducted by men who sat in French assemblies. Nothing in the local balance of force had shifted by so much as a company.

What shifted was the price France was prepared to pay for colonies in general, and it was reset somewhere else entirely.

## The repricing, dated

The sequence runs wholly outside this territory.

**1940–44.** The metropolitan state is defeated, occupied and split into two Frances, each needing Africa to authenticate its claim to be France. That split had already done its work here: it is the reason a subject population acquired unions, a vote and citizenship inside eighteen months, as described in the previous part of this study — because one faction of the French state wanted a counterweight against another.

**1946–54, Indochina.** Eight years of war ending at Dien Bien Phu on 7 May 1954: a European army beaten by a colonial one in a set-piece battle, which is the most expensive single thing an empire can be publicly shown to be capable of losing.

**From 1 November 1954, Algeria.** A war that would not end, in territory legally part of France, consuming conscripts and money on a scale Indochina never had.

**23 June 1956, the framework law.** Universal suffrage, the single electoral college, and internal executive government — granted to each territory *separately*. That is the accounting decision, taken by a state that had just learned in Indochina what holding a colony against its population costs. It devolved internal administration in the places that were not fighting it, and it did so territory by territory, which will turn out to matter more in the Sudan than anywhere else.

**13 May 1958, Algiers.** The settler and army revolt that brought down the Fourth Republic and returned de Gaulle to power.

**28 September 1958, the referendum.** The Community, or immediate independence and the withdrawal of French assistance.

The shape is unmistakable and it is the first finding of this part, stated so that it can be carried to other cases. **In an**

**empire, the cost column that decides a territory's fate is not that territory's own. It is the imperial column, set at the margin by the most expensive case and applied to everything.** The Sudan, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire — a poor colony, a turbulent one and a rich one — were all released by the same event, a war in Algeria in which none of them had any part.

The enforcer kept every soldier and wrote off the reach. The write-off is dateable, and it is an accounting event rather than a military one.

## What the Sudanese ledger read

Now the local half, and here this colony diverges sharply from the rich one on the coast, which is what makes the pair worth setting side by side.

**The fiscal entry, reversed.** French West Africa was a federation with its capital and its services at Dakar, funded disproportionately by the territories that earned foreign exchange. Côte d'Ivoire was the principal earner and resented it; the phrase that carried the grievance there was that the territory should not remain the milk cow of French West Africa. The Sudan stood at the other end of exactly the same transfer. It was landlocked, poor, exported little, and drew on the federation's common services. A territory in that position reads the federation not as a levy but as a lifeline — and it reads the framework law's territory-by-territory design, from the day it passes, as a threat.

This is why the Sudan was federalist before it was anything else, and it was federalist by arithmetic rather than by sentiment.

**The cadres entry.** The Ivorian complaint about paying for Dakar named who was being paid: cadres from Senegal, from Dahomey and from the Soudan. That is the schools policy

coming due in a form peculiar to this colony. The Sudan's formed class — the few thousand products of the regional schools and the federal teachers' college — were not a professional bourgeoisie serving a domestic market, because the Sudan had no such market. They were an exported administrative class, staffing the federation's offices, schools, dispensaries and railways, in Dakar and along the line, out of receipts earned elsewhere. Ask a Sudanese schoolmaster or clerk what the break-up of the federation means and the answer is not abstract. It is his post.

**The property entry, nil.** There were no planters, no proprietors of consequence, no standing crop that could not be repossessed. On the one great agricultural enterprise the cultivators held annual contracts from a state body. What rupture threatened in this territory was not property — there was none to threaten — but a payroll, and the payroll was federal.

**The trajectory entry.** This political class had not been rewarded for staying inside a market. It had been formed in state schools, employed on state wages, and had learned its politics by organising: a teachers' union at Dakar in 1936, the founding congress of the interterritorial party at Bamako in October 1946, and a railway strike of a hundred and sixty days in 1947–48 that shut the federation's exports and ended in a wage rise. What that history teaches is not that the arrangement rewards patience. It teaches that the way to get something is to stop the state working, and then to run it.

Four entries, and three of them pointing in the opposite direction from the rich colony's.

## The yes, and what it was a yes to

On 28 September 1958 the French Sudan voted yes. The figure usually reported is in the high nineties; only Guinea in the whole

of French West Africa voted no. On 24 November 1958 the territory resolved itself into the Sudanese Republic, a member state of the Community.

And then, five weeks later, at a congress held at Bamako on 29 and 30 December 1958, the delegations of four states — Senegal, the Sudan, Dahomey and Upper Volta — agreed to constitute the Federation of Mali. A constituent assembly opened at the palace of the Grand Council of French West Africa on 14 January 1959, and on the seventeenth its forty-four delegates adopted a federal constitution by acclamation.

Put the two events together and the central puzzle of this study dissolves.

The Sudanese yes of September 1958 was not a vote to remain French. It was a vote to remain inside a Community *within which the federation could be rebuilt*. The question the Sudan answered and the question Guinea answered were not the same question, and the fact that both used the word yes or no conceals it. Guinea was asked whether to leave France and said yes, leave. The Sudan was asked whether to leave France and said no, stay — because the thing it actually wanted was not independence from Paris but the preservation of West Africa as a single unit, and staying inside the Community was the route to it.

## What killed it

On 21 and 22 January 1959 the Sudanese and Senegalese assemblies ratified the federal constitution. Dahomey and Upper Volta did not. They withdrew, dissuaded — the French account is explicit — by France and by Côte d’Ivoire, which formed the Council of the Entente with them as the anti-federal alternative.

The Federation of Mali was thereby reduced from four states to two before it had properly begun, and the two remaining were Senegal and the Sudan, neither of which had the receipts

the arrangement needed. It went forward anyway. A federal government was invested on 4 April 1959 under the Sudanese Modibo Keïta, with the Senegalese Mamadou Dia as vice-president and Léopold Senghor as president of the federal assembly. On 29 September 1959 the two states formally requested the transfer of the Community's competences. At Dakar on 13 December 1959 de Gaulle told the federal assembly that France would let Mali accede to international sovereignty and would go on assisting it. Negotiations opened at the Hôtel Matignon on 18 January 1960 and the transfer agreements were signed there on 4 April. On 20 June 1960 the Federation of Mali became independent.

It lasted two months.

On 19 August 1960, days before the federal presidency was to be filled on the twenty-seventh, the crisis broke at a meeting of the federal council. The commander of the Senegalese republican guard arrested the federal army's commanding officer; the gendarmerie, being Senegalese, stood with Senghor and Dia; and in the course of the night the Senegalese national assembly was convened and voted the independence of Senegal. On 21 August Modibo Keïta and the Malian representatives then in Dakar were escorted to the station and put on a train.

They went home up the Dakar–Niger line — the railway built by conscripts of the second portion and by four thousand forced labourers from Upper Volta, the railway whose African workers had struck it for a hundred and sixty days twelve years earlier, the artery that had been the entire economic argument for taking this country in the first place. The federal government of West Africa left Dakar on it.

On 22 September 1960 the Republic of Mali was proclaimed.

## Why the vote did not decide anything

Here is the finding this case exists to produce, and the collection has not had it before in this form.

The referendum of 1958 did not determine the outcome, because the referendum was not about the thing that mattered. What mattered to a poor, landlocked territory whose formed class was employed by a federation was whether the federation survived. That question was not on the ballot. It was decided, over the following eighteen months, by the territory with the export receipts — which used the framework law's territorial design, the one France had adopted for its own accounting reasons in 1956, to build a rival grouping and pull two states out of the federal project.

So the Sudan did not change its mind about France. The thing it had voted for ceased to exist, and it was left holding an independence it had not sought, in a state with no export earnings, no propertied class, and a political leadership whose entire formation and employment had been federal.

What such a state does next is not mysterious. It has exactly one asset, which is itself. Within two years the new republic had left the franc zone and issued its own currency; it took a socialist road; it ran as a single party; and in November 1968 the army removed the government. A man who had opposed leaving the currency died in prison. These belong to the accounting of the following parts and are noted here only to complete the arc.

## What the rupture installed

Set the two colonies together at the end and the symmetry is exact and instructive.

The rich colony's political class was built around property its members already held — trees on land no register had entered

— and what it had asked for, over twelve years, was admission: to the market, to the franchise, to the cabinet. It got admission, and when it inherited the state it foreclosed the politics completely and left the property structure untouched, because the property structure was its own.

The poor colony's political class was built around wages and offices that the state had granted and could withdraw. It had never had anything to be admitted with. What it asked for was control of the thing that granted the wage and the office — and when the federation that employed it collapsed and it inherited a state instead, it foreclosed the politics *and* took the economy, because in a country with no property class there is nothing else to take and nothing else to run.

Neither outcome was a betrayal of the political class's earlier positions. Both were the same class doing at the end what its position had made rational from the beginning. A class formed around property asks to be let in. A class formed around a payroll asks for the till. Only the second has to take the state to get what it wants, and only the second, having taken it, has no reason to leave anything outside it.

*A note on sources.* The metropolitan sequence — the defeat and division of 1940–44, the Indochina war ending at Dien Bien Phu on 7 May 1954, the opening of the Algerian war on 1 November 1954, the framework law of 23 June 1956, the Algiers revolt of 13 May 1958 and the referendum of 28 September 1958 — is standard and is set out here in the same order and to the same effect as in the companion study of Côte d'Ivoire, whose treatment of the metropolitan repricing this part deliberately does not attempt to improve on. The finding that the imperial cost column is set at the margin by the most expensive case and applied to all territories is that study's, restated and here tested against a colony at the opposite end of the federation's accounts, where it holds.

The constitutional and federal sequence is taken from the published French compilations of the independence texts: the resolution of 24 November 1958 constituting the Sudanese Republic; the Bamako congress of 29 and 30 December 1958 at which Senegal, the Sudan, Dahomey and Upper Volta agreed to form the Federation of Mali; the constituent assembly opening on 14 January 1959 and the adoption of the federal constitution by acclamation by forty-four delegates on 17 January; ratification by the Sudanese assembly on 21 January and by Senegal on 22 January, with Dahomey and Upper Volta refusing; the investiture of the federal government on 4 April 1959 under Modibo Keïta with Mamadou Dia as vice-president and Léopold Senghor as president of the federal assembly; the formal request for transfer of competences on 29 September 1959; de Gaulle's declaration at Dakar on 13 December 1959; the opening of negotiations at Matignon on 18 January 1960 and the signature of the transfer agreements on 4 April 1960; independence on 20 June 1960; the crisis of 19–20 August 1960 and the Senegalese proclamation of independence in the night; the escorting of Keïta and the Malian delegation to the station on 21 August; and the proclamation of the Republic of Mali on 22 September 1960. The statement that Dahomey and Upper Volta withdrew *dissuadés par la France et par la Côte d'Ivoire qui crée avec eux le Conseil de l'Entente* is quoted in substance from the French reference account of the Federation and is the single load-bearing causal claim in this part; it is consistent with the Ivorian evidence but it is a claim about motive and it should be corroborated from the diplomatic record before it is relied on further.

Several figures are not established and are flagged rather than smoothed. The referendum result in the French Sudan on 28 September 1958 is reported in the high nineties and the working notes for this study gave about ninety-seven per cent; I have not seen an official return and have therefore not given a figure. As the companion study observed of the Ivorian ninety-

nine per cent and the Guinean ninety-five, a referendum organised by the men who want one answer produces that answer, and none of these percentages should be read as a measurement of opinion. The share of the federation's common expenditure borne by each territory, and the number of Sudanese cadres employed in federal service at Dakar and along the railway, are the two quantities that would convert the fiscal and cadres entries of this part from arguments into arithmetic; both should exist in the budgets of the *Grand Conseil* of French West Africa and neither has been found.

The post-independence events sketched in the closing paragraphs — the departure from the franc zone, the single-party state, the military coup of November 1968 and the death in prison of an opponent of the currency decision — are taken from the working notes for this study and have not been verified here. They are stated only to complete the arc and none of them should be carried into the following parts without being checked against the record.

One thing about method should be said. This part names, for the first time in this study, the man who became the first president of the independent state. He has been kept out of the preceding nine parts deliberately, because he is the output of an arrangement and not its author, and letting him appear early would have coloured the analysis of the machinery that produced him. He belongs here, and he belongs here as the president of a federal government put on a train, which is a truer description of his position in 1960 than any account of his intentions would be.

MODULE 11

# THE YEAR OF THE LARGE CHEST

> *What the arrangement cost the people who lived under it — the sword, the running charge, and the entry that came due by a route nobody had predicted*

## Two columns, and a prediction

The bill for a conquest has two parts and they are of very different sizes.

The first is the sword: people killed in the taking, people killed in the holding, people worked to death, people who died of what was done to them directly. It is the entry everyone thinks of and it is usually the smaller one.

The second is the entry that has no dramatic moment attached to it. A dense population is a coordinated achievement. Intensive agriculture, granaries, trade that moves grain from a district with a surplus to a district with none, an authority that can compel or persuade the movement, kin obligations that spread a bad year across many households — all of that holds a population above the number the land would carry unassisted. Destroy the coordination and the difference between the two numbers dies, quietly, over a few seasons, in villages nobody visits. In most conquests this is the largest single entry in the accounting and the one least likely to appear in any archive.

The prediction going into this module was that the second entry would be small here, and the reasoning was sound. France did not clear this population off its land — it wanted the people, not the ground. It did not destroy an irrigation system, because there was not one to destroy. It captured a tax-collecting

apparatus and kept the fields where they were, and the Bambara cultivator of 1900 was farming the same land the same way as the Bambara cultivator of 1880. On that account the bill should be almost entirely sword, and mostly front-loaded into the conquest decade.

The research half-confirms it and then produces something the prediction did not contain.

## The sword, as far as the archive permits

Take the direct killing first, and accept at the outset that no total can be given.

What survives is episodes. At Ouossébougou in April 1890 a fortified town was carried after a fight through the houses in which, by every French account, nobody surrendered; its commander shut himself in the powder store and fired it. In July 1894, after the defeat of a chief in the Mossi country, the survivors of his village — put at twelve hundred — were divided as spoils among the French officers, the legionaries, the riflemen, the grooms and the porters. In May 1890 the restored king of Ségou and twenty-three of his counsellors were killed. Captives taken by the columns were distributed to the soldiers and to the allied chiefs as a matter of routine, which the administration recorded in its own correspondence.

Then the running charge, which lasted sixty years and killed by attrition. Fortnights of imprisonment on an administrator’s signature, at a volume nobody counted. Taxpayers at Nioro made to carry stones on their heads, whipped, driven through thorn hedges and left in the sun; households at Touroungoumbé pawning their children to raise the tax. Four thousand men from Upper Volta on the railway in 1920 alone, on works that every account describes as murderous and none quantifies. Conscripts of the second portion taken for three years to dig canals. Tens of thousands uprooted and moved onto the irrigation scheme. The

Hamallist leadership of Nioro arrested in a single morning, tortured, and deported to camps in the desert.

Against this, the archive gives exact figures for the other side. Thirteen European officers and non-commissioned officers died at Tacoubao in January 1894 and were exhumed two years later, carried to the coast, shipped to France and buried there under two speeches. Sixty-seven African riflemen and fourteen interpreters and guides died on the same ground on the same morning, and the file is about the officers.

That asymmetry is not a gap in the record. It is the record working as designed, and it means that any number this study gave for the sword would be an invention. None is given.

## The entry that was supposed to be small

Now the second column, and the prediction's first half holds. There is no single catastrophic collapse dateable to the French conquest of the Niger valley. No mass clearance, no destroyed irrigation works, no depopulated province. The comparison available in the neighbouring French empire is instructive: in Ouaddaï, in Chad, a French general estimated the population had fallen from seven hundred thousand in 1912 to four hundred thousand in 1914. Nothing of that order is recorded for the Soudan.

But the note came due, and it came due by a route the prediction did not contain.

The people who lived through it named the years. In Bambara, *diaba* — the great drought — is 1913–14. In Songhay the year is *Gande-beeri*, the large chest, which is what a starving body becomes. In Fulfulde it is *tasbane*, the calamitous year. Among the Fulani of the Niger bend it is *Rafo-manga*, the great famine, or *Kitanga*, the great loss. Two years, four languages, five names.

They named the others too. The crisis of 1901 to 1903, in the immediate aftermath of the conquest, is *Ize-nere* — the sale of children, named for what parents did in it. The locust famine of 1931 to 1932 is *Dao-jiire*, the year of the locusts. There was a smaller drought in 1941–42 and another crisis in 1954. The historian Boureima Alpha Gado, working from oral sources as well as written ones, periodises the region's subsistence crises into three bands: 1888 to 1906, 1912 to 1945, and 1968 to 1985. The middle band is the colonial period almost exactly.

The famine of 1913–14 swept across a vast area of the Sahel. What the administration did about it is the finding.

## What the administration did

It barely responded.

The historian Yan Slobodkin, whose study of famine and the French colonial state is the authority here, establishes the position and the reasoning behind it. In the nineteenth century the French had understood famine as an event of divine or natural origin; relief was accordingly a matter of Christian charity and the Church's business, as in Algeria in 1867, and not a political responsibility. When famine crossed the Sahel in 1913 the civil and military administrations of French West Africa did very little, and the event passed more or less unremarked among French observers.

The measure of that is what happened eighteen years later. In 1931 a far smaller famine, in western Niger, affecting a fraction of the same territory, killed something like thirty thousand people — and it produced a scandal. The governor's administration treated it as a natural disaster outside its purview and responded late and ineffectually, and that response was no longer acceptable to his superiors in Paris.

Nothing about the famine had changed. What had changed was the metropolitan expectation, and the change dates the

shift precisely: somewhere between 1913 and 1931 the French state came to accept famine relief as one of its obligations, and it accepted it because of pressure at home rather than anything on the Niger.

Which tells you what the 1913 silence was. It was not a cover-up. There was nothing to cover up, because nobody in France thought a government was answerable for a bad harvest in the Sahel.

## What had actually been substituted

Here is the refinement this case contributes, and it changes the shape of the metabolic entry rather than the size of it.

France did not destroy the coordination of the Niger valley. It did something narrower and, over sixty years, at least as consequential: it took over the extractive functions of the states it had defeated and did not take over their protective ones.

Consider what the arrangement removed. The pre-colonial states of the valley had granaries, tribute that moved grain, and rulers whose standing depended on their conduct in a bad year. The slave estates of the Maraka towns held people who were property, and property worth feeding. Populations could move: a district in trouble emptied into a district that was not, or across a frontier that was a zone rather than a line. And the old order's demands, whatever else was wrong with them, were largely demands in kind — a share of what there was, which is a demand that falls automatically when there is less.

Consider what the arrangement added. A tax assessed per head, due every year in French currency regardless of the rains, which obliges a household to sell grain in the very year grain is scarce and dear — the reserve going to market at the moment it is most needed and least replaceable. A labour draft falling on adult men in the season the fields require them. A census that made every household legible for both. A frontier that turned

movement into an administrative offence. And a chief whose position depended on delivering the tax and who could be dismissed for failing to.

Consider what it did not add. Any obligation of relief. The one serious attempt — reserve granaries under the chiefs — was judged a failure by the administration's own people. Henri Labouret, a former administrator turned professor at the colonial school, wrote in 1938 that the institution had been thought a panacea against famine and dearth but rested in reality on ignorance of true local conditions among those who recommended it, and that even supposing such an organisation possible it would be very hard to make effective, since grain owners refused to set aside part of their harvest for the silo of the village or the canton.

That is the administration's own verdict on its one insurance policy, delivered by a man who had run cercles.

And people drew the conclusion available to them. The famines of 1913 accelerated the flight of Hausa from French Niger into British Nigeria — a territory better supplied, and one where there was no *indigénat*, no forced labour and no military conscription. When a population walks across a line to be hungry under a different flag, it has performed a comparison.

## The loop

One further thing belongs in this accounting because it closes a circle.

When Émile Bélime came to argue for the great irrigation scheme on the inland delta, he built his case on the reports the cercle commandants had written about the famine of 1913–14. The disaster the administration had not responded to became, fifteen years later, the argument for the project that would move tens of thousands of people under compulsion onto engineered land, take three years of conscripts' lives to dig it, consume a

large share of the colony's revenue, return none, and settle its cultivators on contracts renewed annually at the state's discretion.

The unpaid bill of 1913 was the justification for the bill of 1932.

## What the accounting shows

The prediction was that a conqueror who preserves the system he finds will present a small metabolic bill, and it is half right. Nothing in this colony resembles the classic catastrophe — the smashed waterworks, the cleared province, the population that dies down to what the land gives unassisted. The fields went on being farmed by the people who had farmed them.

What happened instead is quieter and harder to see, and it is a finding about substitution rather than destruction. The order France replaced had extracted from these people and had also, in its own interest and by its own lights, insured them: it held grain, it moved grain, its rulers were judged on the bad year, and it left them free to walk away from a district that had failed. France kept the extraction, refined it, made it annual and payable in cash, and wrote the insurance out of the arrangement entirely — not by abolishing it but by simply not undertaking it, on the settled understanding that a bad harvest in the Sahel was nobody's responsibility.

The result does not produce a number, and this study will not manufacture one. What it produces is a period of about sixty years which the people who lived through it divided into named years — the sale of children, the large chest, the year of the locusts — and a historian's periodisation of subsistence crises whose middle band, 1912 to 1945, is the colonial administration's own working life.

*A note on sources.* No total is given in this part for deaths from any cause, and the reason is stated in the text: the colonial

archive records European dead by name and African dead not at all, and the one place where both appear — Tacoubao in January 1894, with thirteen Europeans, sixty-seven African riflemen and fourteen auxiliaries — is exceptional precisely because the Africans were in French uniform. Any figure this study offered for the conquest or for the running cost would be a construction and would be treated as a fact by whoever read it next. The episodes cited — Ouosséboungou, the twelve hundred inhabitants of Bossé distributed in July 1894, the killing of the restored king of Ségou and twenty-three counsellors in May 1890, the distribution of captives, the exactions at Nioro and the pawning of children at Touroungoumbé, the four thousand Voltaic labourers on the railway in 1920, the second-portion conscripts, the resettlement onto the irrigation scheme, and the arrest and deportation of the Hamallist leadership — are each sourced in the earlier parts of this study and are not re-sourced here. The Ouaddaï comparison, a French general's estimate of a fall from 700,000 to 400,000 between 1912 and 1914, is from the literature on colonial violence in Chad citing Suret-Canale; it concerns a different federation and a different conquest and is offered only as a scale marker.

The vernacular names of the famine years — *diaba* in Bambara for 1913–14, *Gande-beeri* in Songhay, *tasbane* in Fulfulde, *Rafo-manga* and *Kitanga* among the Fulani of the Niger bend, *Ize-nere* for the crisis of 1901–1903 and *Dao-jiire* for that of 1931–32 — are taken from the Sahelian famine literature, principally Boureima Alpha Gado's *Une histoire des famines au Sahel* (1993) and the studies citing it, as reported in the French scholarly reviews. Gado's periodisation of subsistence crises into 1888–1906, 1912–1945 and 1968–1985 is his. I have translated the glosses as they are given in French — *poitrine large* for *Gande-beeri*, *vente des enfants* for *Ize-nere*, *année des criquets* for *Dao-jiire* — and have not attempted to improve on them or to interpret the imagery beyond what the sources state.

The account of the French state's response, and of the shift in doctrine between 1913 and 1931, rests on Yan Slobodkin's study of famine and the French colonial state, and is paraphrased from it: the nineteenth-century understanding of famine as divine or natural in origin and relief as a matter of charity rather than political responsibility; the minimal response of the civil and military administrations of French West Africa in 1913; the contrast with the far smaller famine in western Niger in 1931, killing around thirty thousand and producing a scandal; the governor's treatment of it as a natural disaster outside his administration's purview; and the fact that this view was by then no longer acceptable to his superiors. Slobodkin is the authority on this question and his book should be read entire before this part is built upon. Labouret's 1938 judgement on the reserve granaries is quoted in substance as reproduced in the French scholarship on hunger in French West Africa. The observation that the 1913 famines accelerated the movement of Hausa from French Niger into British Nigeria, which was better supplied and free of the *indigénat*, forced labour and military service, is from the same body of work; the figure of four thousand dead in the Katsina region belongs to the British side of that frontier and is not a Soudan figure. Bélime's use of the cercle commandants' reports on the 1913–14 famine to argue for the irrigation scheme is reported in the French literature on Sahelian desiccation, citing Morabito.

Three things are missing and one of them is serious. There is no death toll here for the famine of 1913–14 in the French Sudan, and I could not find one that I would trust; Slobodkin's chapter on the Sahel in 1913 is the place to look and should be consulted. There is no mortality figure for the railway construction or for the irrigation works, which was flagged as a gap two parts ago and remains one. And there is no demographic series for this territory across the colonial period — the successive censuses, unreliable as they are, would at least establish whether the population of the Soudan grew, stagnated

or fell between 1900 and 1960, which is the single most useful number this part could contain and the one it does not have.

A final caution about method. This part sets out what the pre-colonial arrangement provided and what the colonial one added and did not add. It does not assert that French taxation caused the famine of 1913–14, and the reader should not take it as asserting that: the rains failed across the whole Sahel, in British and French territory alike, and drought in this region long predates any European. What is asserted is narrower and is documented — that a demand for cash falling annually and regardless of the harvest changes what a household can hold in reserve, that the administration undertook no relief obligation and said so, and that its own officials judged its single attempt at a granary system to have been founded on ignorance. The arithmetic is on the page. The sum is not.

MODULE 12

# TWO VOTES, ONE ROAD

> *Reading this case against the others — what all these colonies shared, what local materials made different, why the 1958 ballot turned out not to be the variable, and the strongest defence of the arrangement answered without flinching*

## Where the study began and where it has arrived

It opened on a sentence in a Paris review in 1881: *in the Sudan lies our last chance of making ourselves a great colonial empire*. A defeated republic, denied Europe, looking at a valley nobody had surveyed and calling it a rich market on the strength of travellers' hearsay.

Seventy-nine years later, on 28 September 1958, that territory voted yes to remaining inside the French Community — reportedly in the high nineties — and by 22 September 1960 it was an independent republic, out of the federation it had spent two years building, and within another two years out of the currency as well.

The seed of this study called it the third road, and asked the obvious question: Guinea voted no and ruptured; Côte d'Ivoire voted yes and stayed close; the Soudan voted yes and ruptured anyway, so the vote cannot have been what decided anything. What did?

Twelve parts of evidence permit an answer, and it is not the answer the question expects.

## What this order shared with the others

Almost all of it, and by the arithmetic of position rather than by anybody’s design.

**The floor was thin and mostly African.** Twenty-seven Europeans and two hundred and sixty-five African regulars went up the wall at Ouossébougou with several thousand Bambara allies standing off to take the pursuit. The proportion holds for the whole conquest. This collection has now met the same figure repeatedly: a conquest is affordable not because the conqueror is strong but because the conquered are not organised to be expensive simultaneously — and because the conqueror can hire them.

**The paper came afterwards and faced the wrong way.** A treaty in which one party surrenders his present and future states unconditionally, and the other promises never to send its columns, with the release clause in the following paragraph and its own judgement of when the clause is triggered. A book of such treaties published in Paris in 1897 for European chancelleries. A decree of August 1890 turning an accomplished fact into a colony with a budget line. A sentence of fourteen words in 1904 transferring a country by defining fallow ground as ownerless.

**The story was cut for the payer.** Slavery in this valley was real and enormous, and the crusade against it was the one proposition on which an anticlerical republic and a cardinal preaching from a Paris pulpit could stand together. That is why it was chosen. The Brussels Act of 1890 prescribed, as the means of ending the trade, an administration, garrisoned stations and a railway — which are the three things a European power building an interior colony needs.

**There was no first innocent order.** Every layer in the valley was a conquest that had taken or was still taking: the Moroccan invaders of 1591 whose descendants at Timbuktu were by 1880

simply a local caste, and whose chronicler explained the invasion as God’s judgement on the Songhay’s sins while serving as the invaders’ chief secretary; a Bambara state built in 1712 out of slave-soldiers, where a crown slave became king in 1766; and over both a jihad empire twenty-nine years old when it fell.

**The distance held the seam open.** What was done here and what was said in Paris did not have to be reconciled, and when they were forced into the same room — a deputy at the tribune, a book, a request for a commission of inquiry — the Chamber voted the inquiry down and the officers concerned became generals.

None of this needs a hidden hand and the study has proposed none. It needs only that a large number of men each defended his own position, and that the positions were arranged so that defending them defended the whole.

## Divergence: what the local materials made different

Now the part this case exists to supply, and it turns on three things the Niger valley had and its neighbours did not.

**An unfinished conquest to arrive into.** The collection’s rule is that a conqueror never meets an aboriginal order, only an earlier conquest that took. The Soudan qualifies that. France met three orders of three different ages in the same valley — a millennium-old Islamic society that had fully naturalised, a Bambara political world a century and a half old that had also naturalised, and on top of them a Tukulor empire twenty-nine years old that was still garrisoning its own subjects and had already broken into four. An order that has finished taking leaves a newcomer nothing to recruit. An order still taking leaves a resentful substrate lying about, and France used it: Ségou fell to a French column operating with Bambara allies, on a promise to restore the dynasty the previous conqueror had

displaced. **A conquest can be made cheap by somebody else's incomplete conquest**, and that is not in the collection's earlier cases.

**No crop.** This is the decisive material difference and everything downstream follows from it. Rainfall would not carry a perennial. There was no cocoa to plant, no coffee, nothing a family could put in the ground with a hoe and own for thirty years. What France eventually built instead was a state irrigation scheme on the inland delta, into which tens of thousands were moved under compulsion, where the state owned the water, the canals and the levelled ground, and where the cultivator's right to farm came to be renewed every twelve months by annual contract.

**A payroll instead of a property.** The colony's formed class — a few thousand out of millions — were schoolmasters, clerks, medical assistants, interpreters, veterans and railwaymen, and every one of them drew income, status and qualification from the state or from an enterprise the state ran. They were not even, in the main, employed at home: they were an exported administrative class staffing the federation's offices at Dakar and along the line, paid out of receipts earned in the colony that resented paying them.

## Why the ballot was not the variable

Put the three colonies side by side and the answer to the study's opening question falls out.

Guinea voted no in 1958 and left immediately. The Soudan voted yes and was independent within two years. Côte d'Ivoire voted yes and remained close. On the vote, the Soudan and Côte d'Ivoire agree and Guinea is the outlier.

On everything that followed, the alignment reverses completely. Guinea and Mali both ran single parties, both took the economy as well as the politics, both left the franc zone —

Guinea at once, Mali by 1962 — and both ended the period poorer. Côte d’Ivoire ran a single party too, and left the property structure entirely alone: the planters kept their trees, the market went on functioning, and the economy roughly doubled in twenty years. On the vote, Soudan sorts with Côte d’Ivoire. On the outcome, Soudan sorts with Guinea.

So the ballot did not sort them. What sorted them was whether the colony had produced a class with something of its own.

Where it had — twenty thousand Ivorian smallholders holding trees on land no register had entered — that class wanted admission: equal prices, equal premiums, equal access, a seat. Admission is obtainable inside an arrangement, so its ledger read stay; and having eventually inherited the state, it foreclosed the politics completely and touched none of the property, because the property was its own.

Where it had not — Guinea’s unionised workers, the Soudan’s teachers and clerks and railwaymen and state tenants — the class had nothing to be admitted with. Its position *was* the state’s position. What it therefore wanted was not admission but control of the body that set the wage, granted the office and fixed the price; and there is only one of those. Having taken it, such a class has no reason to leave anything outside it, because in a country with no property class there is nothing else to run.

**The 1958 vote was not the variable because the vote was about France and the outcome was about the class structure.** The Soudanese yes was not even a vote to stay French: five weeks later the same men were at Bamako agreeing with three other territories to build the Federation of Mali, and the yes had been a vote for a Community inside which West Africa could be kept whole. What killed that was not France and not the referendum. It was the withdrawal of Dahomey and Upper Volta, dissuaded — the French account says so — by France and by the richest territory in the

federation, which formed a rival grouping with them. The Soudan did not change its mind. The thing it had voted for ceased to exist, and it was left with an independence it had not sought and one asset, which was itself.

## What the case confirms, complicates and refutes

**Confirms.** That the order holds by alignment and not conspiracy: nearly every man above the cultivator held an office, an allowance, a certificate or a permit that France had created and could withdraw, so every one of them defended the arrangement in his own interest without instruction and without needing to like the others doing the same. That the seam is held open by distance, and that a fact aired and outvoted is safer to an arrangement than a fact suppressed. That an order whose belief never took stays expensive: France catalogued the entire clerical class of a federation in printed volumes, name by name and teacher by teacher, which is what a state does when it knows its story has not landed. That the weak link is nearer the top than the bottom.

**Complicates.** The expected colonial shape, in three places. The story addressed to the metropole turned out to have a second and genuine addressee here, because France needed Bambara auxiliaries and offered them a restoration they actually wanted — a robe cut for the conquered, briefly, because the conquered were being recruited. Withheld formation turned out to be stated as a policy in a governor’s own words: no duty to create openings in the administration for a wholly Muslim population which alone bears the burden of public expenditure. And the metabolic collapse expected of a conquest arrived not by destruction but by substitution — France taking over the extractive functions of the states it destroyed and declining to take over their protective ones.

**Refutes.** One thing outright, and it was this study's own working assumption. It was expected that a person's ability to leave would be a fact about what he owned. The people who walked out of Banamba from 1905 owned nothing but what they could carry; they walked twenty to thirty days to villages that in many cases no longer existed; probably over a million of them moved, and their propertied free neighbours stayed and paid the tax. Exit is not funded by property and is not blocked by a border. **What fills the cost column is whether anyone retains both the power and the licence to bring you back** — and the master's threat here was not softened but made unenforceable, by a state that was propping the masters up and never intended the result.

## What this colony teaches that the others did not

Gathered plainly.

That a conqueror who arrives in the middle of somebody else's unfinished conquest gets the cheapest war available, because the previous conquest has already manufactured his auxiliaries.

That the audience for a colonial title deed may be neither the conquered nor the metropolitan public but a rival European power, and that a treaty executed in two languages may say different things in each — as the French administration itself discovered at Saint-Louis when it compared its own two copies of the Nango agreement.

That a country can be transferred by a definition rather than a seizure: fourteen words lifted from a code written for the French countryside, in which the word *vacant* meant one thing in the Beauce and another in the inland delta.

That the cheapest legitimating story is the one two hostile factions of the metropole can both sign, and that an

international humanitarian treaty may prescribe, as its remedy, precisely the administration, garrisons and railway the signatories wanted anyway.

That a school built to hold hostages, renamed for the sons of chiefs and interpreters, becomes in three generations the institution from which the successor states' presidents are drawn — and that fewer than three thousand men so formed, across eight territories and half a century, is what a refusal to form a population looks like when the bill arrives.

That the surveillance of a belief takes the form of a printed register rather than a censorship, and that an administration which must catalogue its clerics by teacher and affiliation has told you what it thinks of its own hold.

That the one man in a colony who cannot be co-opted is the one holding something the colonial power never granted — and that removing him enlarges him, which is why a government that had interned a sharif for nineteen years concealed his death for two and a half.

That liberties arriving out of the metropole's own quarrel land as a grant and are immediately qualified by the grantors: citizen in May, not an elector in October, and a full vote ten years later.

That a class formed around a payroll discovers, when it looks for what it holds, that what it holds is the ability to stop the state working — and that fifteen thousand railwaymen who shut a federation's exports for a hundred and sixty days have learned a lesson about state power that they will apply when they get one.

And the comparative finding this study ends on, which extends rather than repeats the one before it: **a class formed around property asks to be admitted and, admitted, preserves what it has; a class formed around a payroll asks for the state and, given it, takes everything — and the**

**1958 ballot sorted colonies by neither, which is why a yes and a no led to the same place.**

## The counter-position, at full strength

Now the case against everything above, put as its ablest advocate would put it.

The test of an arrangement is what happened to the people who lived under it, and on the largest single measure available the French record in the western Sudan is not merely defensible but extraordinary. This was a slave society. Slavery was the labour system: it worked the grain estates, filled the armies, and supplied the political class, and the wars of the nineteenth century had been manufacturing captives at industrial scale for fifty years. Between 1905 and about 1910 something over a million people walked out of bondage and went home. Whatever the mechanism, that happened under French rule, and it did not happen under Ahmadu or Samory, whose states ran on the trade. It is the largest act of human liberation in the recorded history of the region.

Second, the wars stopped. The nineteenth century in this valley was continuous conquest — Umar’s jihad, the destruction of Hamdullahi, Samory’s campaigns, the annual razzia. After 1900 that ended, and the peace held for sixty years. A cultivator in 1930 did not expect to be enslaved, which his grandfather did.

Third, and least noticed, the Enlightenment claim was in one respect actually cashed. France suppressed the killing of people accused of witchcraft, prosecuting it as murder and holding in its own courts that a custom contrary to the principles of French civilisation could not stand; and it abolished corporal mutilation, with a civil governor writing in 1894 that he declared the punishment of the rope shameful and barbarous and forbade it absolutely. It did this at a period when other European powers

were consolidating corporal punishment in their own African possessions.

Fourth, it was mild. There was no settler expropriation here, no Congo, no war of pacification comparable to Algeria's. The apparatus was thin and, after 1900, killed very few people.

And the alternative offered against all this is not self-rule. It is Samory, or Ahmadu — conquerors of a decade's standing whose own subjects deserted them and marched with the French.

That is the strongest form. It contains true things. Four refusals answer it, and none of them is a denial.

**Refuse the transferred credit.** The abolition is real; the authorship is not France's. The two historians who established the story state it flatly: the change from slave labour to free labour came not from an administrative decision but from the mass departure of the slaves themselves, France having limited itself to suppressing the trade while reinforcing allied elites who were themselves slave owners. What France actually did, in the fifteen years before the exodus, was keep the caravan duty the defeated rulers had levied and fix it by general order in March 1893 at twenty francs, ten thousand cowries, or one captive in ten; issue receipts for it; let the trader move his people onward under French protection; and distribute prisoners taken by its columns to its own riflemen as their reward. At Médine, the oldest French fort on the river, the square where captives waited to be sold carried a board nailed to a tree with the word *liberté* painted on it. The trade became a criminal offence in 1905, and domestic servitude was addressed by permitting anyone who wished to leave to leave — while in the northern districts masters were allowed to keep those who wished to go, so as not to provoke the desert populations. The million who walked did so because the master's threat had become unenforceable, and it had become unenforceable because a state had monopolised force for entirely different reasons. That

the liberation happened is a fact. That France liberated them is a claim the record does not support.

**Refuse the rigged comparison.** Setting French rule against Samory's is not a comparison of conquest with self-rule; it is a comparison of two conquests, one of which was thirty years old and already breaking. And in this case, unusually, the foreclosed alternative is not hypothetical. It was tried. A federation of West African states, negotiating with France as a bloc rather than territory by territory, was argued for by a real current, constituted at Bamako in December 1958, given a constitution by forty-four delegates of four states in January 1959, and reduced to two states within a fortnight when Dahomey and Upper Volta were dissuaded from ratifying by France and by Côte d'Ivoire. It took independence in June 1960 and was destroyed in August. Whatever else can be said, the third road was not a fantasy of later historians. It existed, it had a government, and it was killed — partly by the territorial design France had adopted in 1956 for its own accounting reasons.

**Refuse credit for parsimony.** This is the decisive answer here and it should be put exactly. Every item on the defence's credit side was produced by the same economy that produced every item on the debit side. France did not refrain from taking land out of respect for African tenure; it did not want the ground, it wanted the people, and it did not build a cadastre because a survey costs money. France's administration was mild because it was thin, and it was thin because Paris would not pay for it — the same department that imposed austerity in 1889 to end what it called the financial fantasy. And that same economy is why eight per cent of children were in school at independence; why a governor could write that there was no duty to create openings in the administration for a population which alone bore the burden of public expenditure; why famine crossed the Sahel in 1913 and the administration barely responded, on the settled understanding that a bad harvest was

nobody’s responsibility; and why a former administrator had to record in 1938 that the one attempt at reserve granaries had rested on ignorance of local conditions. **The mildness and the destitution came out of one decision, which was to spend as little as possible.** You cannot enter the first on the credit side as evidence of a benign colonialism and treat the second as an unrelated shortfall. A light hand and an empty hand are the same hand.

**Refuse cynicism.** And this cuts against the study’s own temptations more than against the defence. Leo XIII and Lavigerie were not lying about African slavery; it was real and worse than they described. The administrators who prosecuted the killing of accused sorcerers as murder believed what they said and were right to say it. The sharif of Nioro was not a fanatic and his followers were not a sect: they held something entirely their own, and France’s inability to catalogue it away is the measure of how real it was. The Bambara who marched on Ségou in 1890 were not dupes; they wanted the Tukulor gone and had good reasons, and they got, for seven weeks, exactly the king they had asked for. The railwaymen who struck for a hundred and sixty days without pay, fed by women walking in from the countryside with millet, were not manipulated by anybody. And the scholar of Timbuktu who wrote the Moroccan conquerors into the Songhay line and explained a defeat by muskets as a judgement of God was not a propagandist; he was a working jurist making sense of a catastrophe he had lived through. A built thing that became real is not a lie. It is a thing that was built and then became real, and the people inside it are not fools for living in it.

## What the study is entitled to say

This study has not shown that French rule in the Soudan was worse or better than any alternative. It has shown what it was

made of, and what it left on the ground when the question was finally asked.

It left a state whose formed personnel numbered a few thousand and had been trained to administer somebody else's federation. It left no propertied class, because the rain would not grow one and the law would not have recognised it. It left an irrigation scheme that had consumed a large share of the colony's revenue for thirty years, returned none, and settled its cultivators on contracts renewed annually at the state's discretion. It left a railway, which is real, and which was built by conscripts of the second portion and by four thousand forced labourers from Upper Volta in 1920 alone. And it left a political class that had learned, correctly and by experience, that the way to get something from a state is to stop it working and then to run it.

The men who inherited that were not passengers. Gallieni chose treaties and Archinard chose columns, out of the same instructions. Bélime chose the delta and got a decree that took three years of conscripts' lives. A sharif chose nineteen years of internment over an accommodation that was available to him at any time. A union secretary chose to call a strike that cost fifteen thousand men five months' wages. A federal president chose the federation and was put on a train at Dakar; a planter's son chose the Entente and broke it. Every one of those was a choice made with the materials at hand, and the materials were not the same in any two places — which is why a border drawn by the same ministry, under the same law, in the same decade, produced a country of smallholders and a country of civil servants, and why they went in opposite directions at the same fork for reasons that had nothing to do with how they voted.

Structure made each outcome overwhelmingly likely. Men made each one certain. This study cannot separate them, and does not believe the men could have either.

*A note on sources.* This part draws its evidence from the eleven parts preceding it and does not introduce new material; every factual claim restated here — the composition of the columns, the treaty texts, the Brussels Act, the domanial decree, the schools, the caravan duty, the Banamba exodus, the *indigénat*, the internment of the sharif of Nioro, the railway strike, the legislation of 1945–46 and 1956, the constitutional sequence of 1958–60, and the famine years — is sourced in the part where it first appears, and the cautions recorded there apply here unchanged. Where a figure was flagged there as unverified, as a range, or as an order of magnitude, it is used here on the same terms.

The comparison with Côte d’Ivoire and Guinea rests on the companion study of Côte d’Ivoire in this collection, whose treatment of the metropolitan repricing and whose finding about property and labour as bases for a counter-elite this part extends rather than reproduces. The Ivorian and Guinean particulars used for contrast — the cocoa and coffee smallholding, the planters’ syndicate and its property qualification, the fiscal grievance about the federation, the Guinean union movement and bauxite, and the post-1960 trajectories of both — are that study’s and are not independently verified here. Anyone using this part comparatively should read it alongside that one and should treat the two as a pair rather than as separate verdicts.

Three claims in the counter-position section need their provenance stated. The suppression of the killing of people accused of witchcraft, and the holding that a custom contrary to the principles of French civilisation could not stand, come from a judgment of the homologation chamber of the appeal court of French West Africa of 14 September 1909, quoted in Abdramane Traoré’s study from the Senegalese archives. The prohibition of the *coups de corde* comes from a letter of the governor of the French Sudan of 19 July 1894, quoted from the Malian archives

in the same study, together with the observation that France imposed this prohibition at a time when other European powers were consolidating corporal punishment in their colonies. That observation is Traoré’s and is reported as his; it is a comparative claim about several empires and this study has not tested it. All three should be checked against the originals before being used in argument, and the second and third are quoted at one remove.

Two matters of method should be recorded at the close. First, this part states the case for the arrangement at what I take to be its full strength, including the strongest single item — the abolition and the exodus — and then answers it. If the statement is weaker than an able advocate would make it, that is a failure of this study and not of the position, and the reader is entitled to strengthen it. Second, no verdict is offered and none is withheld out of timidity. The arithmetic is on the page: what was taken, from whom, by what instrument, at what cost, and what was left. The sum belongs to a reader standing somewhere this study is not.